SOME ASPECTS OF POST-WAR ARMY PSYCHIATRY

BY

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My trusted adviser, who is wise in the ways of the Army and the sceptical world outside, has stated that in order to confirm my comparatively recent status of specialist it would be advisable to write a paper on some aspects of my subject for publication. Brushing aside all my objections, he explained that in my "line of country" there were innumerable opportunities for pretty exercises of the intellect. The paper itself did not have to be drearily profound or painstakingly detailed. Provided it were written with sincerity, looked workmanlike and sounded thoughtfully provocative, it would attract no unhealthy interest and would always merit a line in the Medical Directory. He also added that no self-respecting disciple of orthodox medicine ever gave more than a fleeting and amused glance at the eccentric workings of a psychiatrist's mind.

Having therefore been persuaded, it only remained for me to find a suitable theme. At that point all the difficulties arose. The physicians, surgeons, hygienists and medical administrators have respectively their antibiotics, abdominal fretwork, fly-proof latrines and past campaigns. But psychiatrists, particularly in the Services, have very little tangible to show for their efforts. They juggle with abstractions which can neither be weighed, measured, stained nor cultured. Because analysts tackling the same psychological problem are generally like explorers trying to penetrate a dense forest from different points on its periphery, their signposts, their methods of approach and their scales of progress values may have hardly a thing in common. Official records demand labels, and so a syndrome of mental disorder, both protean and complex in character, must be given a diagnosis which most nearly conforms to that group of symptoms presenting at the stage of the natural history of the disease when it is investigated by a hurried and overworked Area Psychiatrist. Modern psychiatry is dynamic, and the aspiring specialist has to guide him a few basic principles, an individual flair for the intricacies of human relationships and a distrust of all trite empiricisms.

It seemed at that time that a theme which would at once be interesting, instructive and topical could be elaborated under the title "Psychology and the Military Virtues." Assuming that the phrase "military virtues" implied the ability to win battles, it was necessary to determine the qualities inherent in the make-up of a good and successful soldier. The answer to the problem was possibly to be found in the biographies, autobiographies and diaries of the

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most significantly victorious generals of the remote and recent past. In the records of these warriors, both conventional and unorthodox, there was plenty of material for research in the frank self-revelations, the elaborately veiled excuses, the aggressive dogmatisms and the straightforward unvarnished histories of hardly-won experience. Because generals do not win battles alone, it was imperative to know something of all the cogs in an intricate military machine.

Here again there was an abundance of books, letters and poems, passionate vignettes of private wars, and moments isolated in trenches, deserts and jungles. Discounting the modesty, the naïve pomposity, the over-dramatization and the sentiment, the bare bones of the soldierly ideal began to take shape. It was nothing new nor unexpected to find that certain qualities were constant, the military virtues embracing courage, initiative, intelligence, a quick fancy and determination. Fundamentally there was always present to a marked degree the triad of a high personal morale, a rational and far-sighted courage and an ability to improvise or "make-do." For the rest, the other ingredients were blended according to the status in the military hierarchy. To find out what where the necessary qualifications for any given rank you placed the standard pattern of a good soldier in front of the appropriate distorting mirror and saw the individual components distended, attenuated or reduced to insignificance as the position of responsibility demanded. But it must not be thought that lance-corporals and field marshals gave for their respective ranks identically similar quality profiles. With the increase in seniority there was a corresponding increase in the allowance for an idiosyncrasy. A private in a closely integrated organization like the Army cannot afford to be an individualist, but a general has to be in order to exist. The authenticated eccentricities of military genius make fascinating reading and raise an interesting point as to whether great leaders become so because of their biases, mannerisms or peculiarities, or develop them in order to emphasize the isolation of command and cloak its vulnerability. Most of these quirks and foibles were harmless and socially acceptable, but from the slightly jaundiced viewpoint of an Army psychiatrist it is an interesting commentary on the modern trend towards universal standardization that many of these great captains, now legendary and dead, would have, by reason of their obvious instability and unequally balanced characters, failed to clear the first obstacle on the road to a present-day O.C.T.U.

Only a very few of the best soldiers ever become generals, and even fewer of the generals remain consistently good soldiers. However, officers of this rank as objects of field study in the military virtues are not generally within the scope of a back-area psychiatrist. Apart from these considerations the suspicion was steadily growing in my own mind that I was trying to concoct some unnecessarily complicated technical formula for a group of qualities which any good and experienced Regular serjeant would have recognized instinctively and dismissed succinctly as "discipline" or "guts."

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In the interval between wars, the good soldier with his extremely specialized capabilities tends to become something of a social anachronism. Subjected to economic disadvantages, fulfilling less than his true function, in part a drab and utilitarian symbol of past pageantry and ceremonial, and always a reminder of past and present threats to the security of the individual, the family and the group, the soldier tends to feel himself relegated to the background of national esteem. The advent of the atomic age and the growing importance of the military technician will obviously affect our present concepts of the minimum required of a soldier, so perhaps it would be more to the practical point to consider some of the principal psychiatric aspects of the Army today.

The Army is, apart from a small cadre of professional soldiers, largely composed of young National Service men, a highly selected class drawn from the same age groups and influenced in the most formative periods of their lives by roughly similar environmental factors. There is now no war, but always the ever-present shadow of one. The Army is concerned with its programme of essential training at home, and its policing and protective commitments abroad, where life may vary for the individual from monastic seclusion to near-sybaritic comfort. Basically, it seems to me, the teen-age conscript exhibits an ambivalent attitude towards his Service. Conscription is only a comparatively recent innovation in British history, and is still regarded in peacetime as an intrusion on the private life of the average citizen, who stolidly maintains that he knows his duty when he sees it. In any case, the young soldier of today generally considers it no distasteful ordeal to serve his country, even though it may be in a pedestrian and purely temporary capacity. But having decided to "muck in," he finds himself faced with a strong element of rejection. He is too young to be a veteran, and too near the veterans in age not to feel resentment at his non-participation in the exclusive cameraderie of old campaigners. At first he tends to welcome the approach of his Army life, because the status of a soldier symbolizes the attainment of manhood with the ability to shoulder its responsibilities. For the first time he may have moved outside the inhibiting influences of his immediate family circle, and there is the promise of freedom and essays into a world of fresh experience. But soon he is confronted with a new set of prohibitions comprising the minor but necessary restrictions of Service discipline, and all his old, hidden, but deep-rooted resentment against the parental authority becomes displaced on to the Army, which as a father-substitute is much more implacable, impersonal and demanding. It is against this background of uneasy loyalties that the Army psychiatrist sees the bulk of his problems, and elicits the significant and revealing case histories of the unstable dullard, the neurotic and the psychopath.

If personnel selection and available man-power were contented bed-fellows, the Army dullard would eventually vanish, and the minimum standard of intelligence for recruits would then be adequate for most of the skilled

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technical employments. But various considerations, political, economical and sociological, necessitate the retention in the Army of this intellectual flotsam of the civilian population. The stable dullard, clean, cheerful, well-behaved and amenable to discipline, can be, and is, gainfully employed in some familiar, repetitive and routine job where the responsibility is slight and the demands on initiative few. But when emotional instability masks and complicates the essential subnormality the inability to adjust to Service conditions is emphasized, and there is a rapid development of the more florid psychological disturbances.

In the Army the dullard, however well intentioned, is fundamentally at a disadvantage. His equipment and personal belongings are at the mercy of the barrack-room scavenger. Blundering from one difficulty to another, he becomes the butt of his small group, and ready material for the witticisms, occasionally cruel and often unnecessary, of N.C.O.s, who are frequently too young and inexperienced in their handling of men. Suggestible and eager to be accepted, he becomes the tool and victim of his less scrupulous mates, and if things do go wrong he is quickly involved in a vicious circle of crime and punishment. Resentful, bewildered, and a self-conscious misfit, it is not surprising that he either goes absent, rebels against authority or finds a vicarious solace in chronic invalidism. This is the type of soldier who forms an appreciable percentage of the Army population in civil and military prisons, and the problems to which he gives rise, administrative, disciplinary, financial and medical, will only finally be solved by the total exclusion of all dullards from the fighting Services.

A quick survey of the cases referred for psychiatric opinion over the past year reveal the inevitable high percentage of psychoneuroses. These vary at one end of the scale from the simple anxiety states and conversion hysterias, where the clinical ground is solid and the main tracks direct and well marked, to the near-, abortive-, and pseudo-psychoses, where the confused and indistinct pathways to the hinterland of the mind wander over a morass of symptomatology. In the first group the rationale and mechanism of production are clear cut, capable of easy interpretation and possessing a good therapeutic prognosis. In the last there is an intricate, multi-layered structure of neurosis in which Army service is only a minor contributory factor, and the short-term prognosis from the military viewpoint is correspondingly poor. It is axiomatic that no psychiatric symptom can be produced in isolation as a sudden and unexpected personality variant, but must have a strong and definite relationship to the life pattern of the individual. This is a pertinent consideration when discussing the functional disorders of the post-war conscript.

There is a popular belief that the generation of infants and young schoolchildren in the first World War developed some peculiarity in its emotional make-up. It was said to be of more delicate fibre and more temperamental than its predecessors. As proof of this were instanced the alarming increase in youthful delinquency, the extraordinary fashions in adolescent clothes, games

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and fancies, and the frenetic escapist activities of the late twenties and early thirties with their mass outbursts of juvenile stupidity. This is the generation which contributed largely to our expeditionary forces in the early critical years of World War II. What real significance the environmental factors of the period 1914–1918 may have had in the overall picture of psychiatric breakdown in 1939–1945 is still to be assessed.

These two periods are not strictly comparable. During the recent war Britain was an armed camp where the disturbing influences of alien cultures and national characteristics rippled out to the most secluded of country hamlets. The war could come suddenly and in its crudest form to anybody's doorstep, and almost every family was involved by intimate ties of blood in the battles on the land and sea and in the air. A family could be bombed, uprooted, evacuated, transplanted and dispersed in the space of a few days. The lives of young children and adolescents were regulated not by the familiar school bells and factory hooters but by air-raid sirens, which could change night into day and make of every new dawn a question mark. Young people, often unprepared and ill-equipped, were asked to assume adult responsibilities. The total impact of all these factors on a character, as yet immature and developing in an atmosphere of insecurity, would obviously tend to crystallize any latent instability. The seeds of a future neurosis were well sown, and it only required the additional factors of a renewed family separation, loneliness, frustration and maladaptation to bring it to full bloom. In a detailed life history of any psychoneurotic conscript some or all of these environmental factors are to be found. The diagnosis of these conditions is generally easy, the psychopathology is not often obscure, but when it comes to the question of treatment and disposal the Army Psychiatrist is prone to subject himself to many troubled heart-searchings.

Looking at any case from a military aspect he is forced to realize that the Army with the short time at its disposal for training and its limited facilities for individual instruction cannot afford to carry unreliable and uneconomical passengers. With the possibility of slow long-term treatment, the lack of hospital beds and skilled psychotherapists, and the knowledge that many of these patients can be quickly restored to a high degree of social usefulness by the simple expedient of returning them to civilian life, the psychiatrist is constantly tempted to cut the Army's losses by recommending many of these young moderate and severe psychoneurotics for invaliding out of the Service. The tendency is, and I think quite correctly, to devote more time and attention and the resources of rehabilitation to those Regular and older soldiers who, after a period of useful service, have temporarily broken down. Their experience is valuable, and their retention if their prognoses are reasonably good is always desirable. It is probably this pragmatic approach to the problem of disposal which has given a handle to the vociferous but mainly uninformed critics of Army psychiatry, who maintain that it functions chiefly for the purpose of removing any non-co-operative soldier easily and expeditiously from

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the Army. It is nearly always these very same critics who, when faced with a problem soldier in their own commands, clamour for permission to use the psychiatric "backdoor out of the Army" in order to dispose conveniently of the evidence of their own failures in man-mastership and unit administration.

The word *psychopath* like the majority of the personalities it is intended to identify is a smooth, beguiling sort of word which trips much too easily and glibly off the tongue of the apprentice-psychiatrist. The true psychopath with his outstanding deformity of character, his overwhelming egoism and his psychological stunting is not a common occurrence, but in the Army he creates an administrative furore out of all proportion to his numerical representation. The inadequate and the creative types do not present any major difficulties in disposal. They may not make good soldiers, but as civilians they must compromise with life or go under. If they do decide to tackle the conflicting currents of reality they generally bob along, partially submerged, in the stream of existence, or drift into some quiet backwater of human society where, as fanatics, eccentrics, "anti-" bodies, in the comforting isolation of their own kind, they make a patchy adaptation to the business of living. The aggressive psychopath, however, even though his anti-social traits may be dominant, can always find employment in the Army in times of war. His short-lived intense enthusiasms, his unconsidered, hair-trigger reactions, and his innate capacity for taking and holding the centre of the stage, are liable under favourable conditions to make him into a hero. With, as in many cases, a combat temperament of a high order, he can measure up to most of the fighting qualities of a good soldier. Provided his sphere of action and initiative is not too restricted and he is responsible only to himself or a small group of kindred spirits, he can make an admirable member of a private army or special force, where his nihilistic tendencies can be diverted into militarily praiseworthy channels. But as a soldier in peacetime he is in all except a small minority of cases an embarrassing misfit. With his self-seeking perspicacity he sees the Army as an irritating confusion of "usual channels" where promotion and recognition are slow and where the rewards of high virtue are discouragingly meagre. To him there is an incomprehensible unfriendly attitude towards independence.

This is his distorted perspective of the total situation, and the more astute psychopath is eager for the pickings of a post-war civilian world. In the atmosphere of shady business, questionable politics and the organized exploitation of human frailties he is much more likely to find his own niche. It is not entirely his fault for, if one examines the life-histories of those military psychopaths brought to court-martial and detained in penal institutions, it is observed that the influence of early environment nearly always outweighs that of heredity. These are the men who were for the most part conceived and reared in an earlier era of post-war depression, suffered in nearly every case from some degree of parental rejection, experienced the weakening of family ties and lowered private and public standards, and grew to physical maturity

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in a jungle-like atmosphere of appeasement and unbridled aggression. If they became predatory lone wolves or combined in gangs to defy and dominate society, in emulation of their betters, then some of the responsibility must lie with that society which was so complacently blind to its own defections.

Unfortunately the psychopath is ubiquitous. He comes from all conditions and classes, and graduates from the approved schools, the great colleges, the factories and the universities. He infiltrates into business, diplomacy and all the professions. He is equally conspicuous in the barrack-room and the officers' mess. It is in this very width and depth of his distribution that the danger lies. The higher his intelligence, the better his background, the more polished his veneer, the more readily is society prepared to tolerate him and suffer his depredations. For this reason society has to be protected. The disposal of the aggressive anti-social psychopath is not really settled by his ignominious discharge from the Army to civil life, because no honest sociologist can ever dissociate himself from the larger issues involved. The criminal psychopath is said never to benefit from experience or precept; therefore one cannot appeal to a morality which is manifestly impaired or hope for a spontaneous change of heart. He may be swayed only by the fear of immediate corporal punishment or the threat of rigid segregation. In the present state of affairs these are unsatisfactory alternatives, but what the future holds in the fields of psycho-surgery, neuro-physiological research, the more drastic methods of re-orientation or even life-long supervision is still very much a matter of speculation and argument.

One of the most disturbing though interesting trends in post-war military medicine is the high and increasing incidence of psychiatric breakdown in re-enlisted Regular soldiers. Apart from the ex-prisoners-of-war and those men who have not revealed evidence of previous emotional instability, their stories all follow a familiar pattern. During the war the majority have served, often with distinction, abroad, have been demobilized with their respective groups and have left the Army with good testimonials and clean bills of health. But soon they have found that for them the tempo of civilian life has changed. Added domestic responsibilities, difficulties in accommodation, poor jobs with poorer prospects, and a diminished resilience to the hurly-burly of living cause them to look back. They invest their past Service careers with an over-coloured and nostalgic aura of friendship and security. And so, for various reasons, back to the Army they come, refugees from a world in economic flux. But between the Armies of 1945 and 1949 there is infinitely more than just a few years of difference. Units have split up and disappeared. Loyalties are vague and amorphous and in very few ways strictly defined. There is no guarantee that a man will see his family settled in married quarters, and even if there were, the prospect of early separation is never far away. The changes have been so marked, and the Regular soldier is so thin on the ground, that the re-enlisted men often find themselves in an unexpectedly difficult situation. In these circumstances, the man who has not succeeded as a civilian and is

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deteriorating as a soldier will either develop a neurosis or begin to rebel against authority. Here the psychiatrist has to use all the practical means at his disposal. If the soldier is going to remain in the Army he must be rehabilitated, carefully allocated, and his abilities, such as they are, fully utilized and exploited. If his confidence is to be restored, then the welfare of his family must be reasonably assured, and there should be for him the possibility of a financially satisfactory future. When there is no alternative but discharge to civilian life use ought to be made of Industrial Rehabilitational Units and the wide and generous resources of the National Association of Mental Health. A man who has genuinely served his country well in times of need deserves all the help and consideration that that country can give him, not because it conforms to the conception of a prodigal Welfare State but because it is the common-sense approach to the safe-guarding of the national heritage.

Officers, like any other small section of the community, have their general and specific psychological occupational hazards. Within a few years of the ending of any war the status of the serving officer undergoes a subtle decline. A large proportion of a war-weary and disillusioned democracy tends to regard the Regular officer as a symbol of reaction, of unmerited and casual authority, an expensive gewgaw in the social structure, unwilling to relinquish the privileges of rank and unable to cope with the competition of civilian life. This faint but definite hostility is directly the least of the stresses to which the post-war officer is exposed but, to my mind, is indirectly responsible for many of his psychoneurotic manifestations.

The Emergency Commissioned Officer is relatively unaffected, but the officer with a Short Service Commission who has no specialist qualifications realizes, if he faces up to the situation, that he is at a critical point in his career. His future in the Army is uncertain, and his prospects circumscribed. The longer he delays his return to civilian life the more handicapped is he likely to be in the struggle for economic security. It is this long, difficult and reluctant reverse metamorphosis from military butterfly to civilian workaday grub that gives rise in less well-integrated personalities to anxiety and chronic indecision. In this post-war period it is the Regular officer who is generally faced with the more serious conflict. Accelerated wartime promotion has been more than offset by drastic cuts in expenditure involving reductions in establishments and reversion to substantive ranks. His inclinations and loyalties are bound up with his Service career for which he has spent a considerable time fitting himself, and unless he is compelled by economic necessity he has no wish to take up any other occupation. He also suspects that no civilian organization is going to rate him as high as his own Army evaluation. The young or middle-aged officer with private means is becoming uncommon, and if such a one suffers a psychoneurotic breakdown it is almost always due to some intensive reactive disturbance in his emotional life, a sexual anomaly or a constitutional personality defect. When there are dependants and his pay the only source of income he usually finds that it is barely sufficient to meet his essential

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needs. As he manœuvres to adjust his mode of existence to the rising cost of living and sees his margin of financial security progressively diminishing, it is natural that he should begin to doubt his wisdom in the choice of a career and lose confidence in his ability to provide adequately for his family. It is in the spiritual wastelands that border his fortieth year of age when a man pauses to take stock of the past and the future that these factors of questioning introspection seem to operate most strongly. It is roughly in this same age-group that one has found in married officers an increasing number of anxiety-depressions and psychosomatic disorders. The officers who are most affected are those who are punctilious in meeting their obligations, possessed of a high-minded aggressive sense of duty and are meticulously conscientious, but who outside their Army lives are intellectually and socially arid. There is much that is important to be written about the essential relationship of service security and psychiatry, particularly in the cases of those specialist officers who wittingly carry on at a great disadvantage in comparison with their civilian counterparts. Under existing conditions psychoneurosis in the Regular officer is often basically not a real psychiatric problem but an economic one, and the solution appears to lie in the appreciation of his difficulties, wise state-craft and intelligent long-term military planning.

The Army does not exist in a social vacuum. Its structure, policy and internal economy are to a large extent controlled by civilian politicians and civil servants. Its man-power today is predominantly drawn from a body of young men whose outlook is uncompromisingly civilian and who do not pretend for a moment to be anything but very temporary soldiers. In order to understand something of the underlying problems of morale in the post-war Army it is necessary to recognize a few of the more adverse trends in modern life. The author has neither the experience nor the foolhardiness to attempt any detailed psycho-social survey, but in his daily travels through a great city certain superficial aspects of the atomic age seem to be distressingly obvious. The more progressive a civilization is said to be, the more does it seem to be in need of psychiatric help and guidance. Beneath the airily optimistic and academic talk of universal brotherhood, antagonisms, domestic and international, are once again hardening. There is almost a wilful and provocative misunderstanding of the other man's needs, and paranoia is the habitual indulgence of the growing army of self-considered dispossessed. It is in the ordinary things such as the behaviour of crowds during the peak period on public transport that one recognizes the vast untapped reservoirs of anti-social aggression and atavistic self-centredness, which are only just covered by the threadbare, patchwork quilt of convention.

The minor courtesies which enhance the art of living are falling more and more into abeyance. Deception and warped rationalization are increasingly becoming the accepted means of profit in commerce and, in the world of entertainment, one has only to gratify the cruder demands of the libido in order to achieve a popular if ephemeral success. This may sound pessimistic, but in any society it is always its vices which are emphasized at the expense

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of its virtues, and it is certainly the vices which most influence the characters of the young men, who in their turn make the Army. With the wealth of constantly changing material at its command, the Army has great potentialities for good. It can re-educate and re-mould to its own design, and if it does nothing else but inculcate the right sort of self-discipline and the knowledge of man's essential reliance on man, it will have done a great deal towards preventing that final Armageddon, which, if it comes, can only result in the destruction of all that is best and progressive in humanity.

Army psychiatry is once again experiencing the downward swing of the pendulum. With an almost dangerous lack of suitable specialists, adequately trained staff and hospital accommodation, particularly for women, it is only a skeleton of the efficient wartime organization which fully proved its worth. But despite his limitations the military pyschiatrist can be an important and valuable link in the chain of Service medicine. In this connexion the concept of bio-psychic medicine is fortunately gaining ground. Those chronic psychosomatic conditions which failed to respond to unimaginative routine treatment are now being recognized earlier, and the psychiatrist is now called in for consultation at a stage when his help can be more effective and his therapy less drastic. Finally, if the Army psychiatrist is to be of any use, he must emerge from his ivory tower of theory and adopt a positive policy of mental health. He should know a little of everything, be impartial and objective, always take the common-sense and practical approach, and above all know a good deal of the personalities of those medical colleagues with whom he is going to work. He may not achieve all these objects, but even if he partially succeeds he will have done a considerable amount in helping to raise the status of Service medicine to that high eminence in the profession which it should rightly enjoy.

Review

British Red Cross Society First Aid Manual No. I. Ninth Edition. By Sir Harold E. Whittingham, *K.C.B., K.B.E.*, F.R.C.P., and Sir Stanford Cade, *K.B.E., C.B.*, F.R.C.S., published by Macmillan & Co., price 3s. 0d.

This compact little volume provides a comprehensive vade-mecum for the practical first-aider.

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New and practical features in this edition are the chapters on miscellaneous emergencies, action at the incident, and first-aid in Civil Defence.

E. G.

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