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Editorial

ARMY HEALTH

RECENT years have seen a great widening of outlook in the struggle for the attainment of health. There has been a realization of the way in which the complicated interplay of all the factors which make up the environment of the individual may affect health. This change in outlook has been demonstrated in the establishment of the faculties of Social Medicine in our universities and the movement towards the expansion of our national social services has received a good deal of its impetus from the same basic causes.

The modern approach to army health has been inevitably associated with this general change in scope. Linked with this is the additional factor that the much increased tempo of modern warfare, combined with the ever-growing complexity of weapons, equipment and material demands a higher degree of mental and physical health than ever before.

The system of National Service has also had far-reaching effects. It imposes a special responsibility on the medical services in that the health of the youth of the nation is placed in the trust of the armed forces at a most important stage in their lives. If it imposes a responsibility, it also offers an opportunity, the opportunity of educating the young men of the nation in the principles of the attainment and maintenance of positive health in addition to the more tangible improvement in their physique.

The functions of the Army Health Service can be defined as the maintenance and enhancement of mental and physical health and efficiency and the prevention of disease. This can only be achieved by consideration of every detail of environment. The peculiar feature of Service life is the almost endless number of changes in environment which affect an individual in his Service career. Each of these environments must therefore be studied, the particular hazards defined and the preventive action taken, whether it be the provision of proper accommodation, special clothing, special diet, preventive inoculation or such measures as the proper psychological approach to arduous or boring conditions. These measures must cover in addition to the care of the soldier, the care of the soldier's wife and children.

Much thought has been given, in industry, to getting the right man into the right employment from the point of view of his physique, his mental capacity and his inclinations, since satisfactory adjustment to employment must be one of the fundamentals of happiness and health. The Army has developed schemes for medical classification and personal selection which aim at getting the individual into the right job and also enable the best to be got out of our national man-power resources.

Having fitted a man to a job the process may with advantage be reversed and the job studied in its relation to the man. Here the investigation and improvement of working conditions and hours, of the design of mechanical equipment and vehicles, of lighting, methods of relieving monotony and fatigue and of all the other aspects of occupational health produces a dividend in increased comfort, efficiency and contentment and therefore in health.

Having discussed the modern outlook in approach and in scope one may now consider the change in name. Properly the name "Hygiene," the cult of Hygeia, the Goddess of Health, could well cover the subject. In the popular view, however, the word hygiene had become so debased that it signified to many only the very restricted field of sanitation. Sanitation is still, of course, a vital factor and unless a high standard is maintained there will inevitably be an excessive loss of man-power through preventable disease in the tropics or sub-tropics but as has been shown the field is now very much wider. Hence the Directorate of Hygiene has become the Directorate of Army Health and a similar change of title has been effected throughout the various levels of the organization.

The duties of the Directorate of Army Health and of Army health personnel at all levels are primarily advisory. Their main task is the education of all in the science and art of the attainment and maintenance of health. Much can only be done by individuals themselves but much must also be done by the precept and example of all medical officers and regimental officers. In recent years the term "Health Discipline" has come into use. This is a combination of the traditional art of "man management" with the application and intelligent use of modern scientific methods for guarding against special risks. The problems of atomic and bacteriological warfare are likely to multiply the number of preventive and protective measures required.

The Army Hygiene Staff had a record of solid achievement, demonstrated by the steady improvement in the health of the soldier, of which they could well be proud. The Army Health Staff can look forward to similar progress in the future over a wider field.