

At Random

CANCER AND CIGARETTES

CANCER would not appear, on first thoughts, to be very much a concern of medical officers in the Services in which the bulk of the population is in the prime of life, is composed of strictly selected individuals and leaves the Service before manifestations of the condition are probable.

In some of the more recent reports Cancer is, however, definitely shown amongst the causes of discharge. In a *Report on the Health of the Army*¹ discharges for malignant neoplastic conditions in 1943-45 averaged approximately 0.6 per cent only of the total discharges for Other Ranks (males) and only 0.4 per cent of those for A.T.S. (women), but 1.8 per cent of the discharges from the Q.A.I.M.N.S. and V.A.D.s (women). These figures refer, of course, to all types of malignant neoplasm whereas the reference under the title *Cancer and Cigarettes* is to neoplasm of the lungs.

But even of this condition there is undoubtedly in the Services a small number of cases which persistently appear amongst the more senior members of the Services, particularly very senior Officers and Warrant Officers with long service.

In these cases diagnosis is often extremely difficult and sometimes definitely too late because of the lack of local facilities, because of the unwillingness of such Seniors to report sick and to risk loss of an important post or high responsibility and because an accommodation diagnosis of *a little bronchitis* or of *a touch of asthma* has already been made elsewhere by some casual medical man or some diffident junior officer. We can recall some eight to ten such cases amongst military and other Service Seniors.

Cigarettes, on the other hand, appear to be very much the concern not only of medical officers in the Services but of many other officers in charge of supply, transport and welfare.

It is astonishing to think of the rapid growth of smoking and to realize how much the cigarette habit has increased in the past twenty-five years. The volume of tobacco consumption in recent times can be assessed by the facts that in one family of manufacturers there were five millionaires, that those concerned with the trade can advertise so lavishly and expensively and that no inconsiderable part of the revenue of the country and indeed of other nations is derived from the heavy taxation thereon.

So much so has this habit increased in the Services that on field service during the last war the importance of the cigarette ration appeared at times to pre-

¹The Statistical Report on the Health of the Army, 1943-45. His Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1948, pp. 294. Price £1.

dominate over that of food. When about half the forces on the eastern (Burma) front were on half rations (food) for many weeks owing to the difficulties of supply, it was somewhat disconcerting and distressing to hear that a supply ship had actually reached Calcutta safely of which almost the entire cargo was a consignment of cigarettes. It may be added in parenthesis that the Pipe Smoker often had considerable difficulty in securing a pipe-tobacco-ration.

But this note is not intended to be a disquisition on the merits and demerits of cigarette smoking and its effects on efficiency, sociability or nerves. There are smokers and non-smokers in plenty who will only too willingly enter into heated argument on this vexed subject. It is pertinent to the subject, however, to recall one or two points before leaving this aspect. It is interesting to look around and see the number of senior men and women who used to be cigarette smokers and have now given it up; this may, of course, be a result of the present fantastic financial aspects of the luxury, and on the other hand to note that many an ardent junior smoker is spending at least £100 a year on his/her fancy. It is interesting to note that in a series of trials in the Aldershot Command some years ago it was found that in short distance races smokers and non-smokers were equally represented in the first ten and the last ten, but in long distance races all the first ten were non-smokers and all the last ten were heavy cigarette smokers.¹

But it is to the subject of Cancer and Cigarettes to which this note is intended to draw attention. The subject has recently² been much to the fore in current medical journals and has received further publicity from certain articles in the lay press and certain claims in respect of a cure for cancer which is now to have an official examination by a select committee under the orders of the Minister of Health.

Investigation into the subject of Cigarettes and Cancer has been most ably carried out with very considerable labour and care by a team from the Medical Research Council and embodied in their report³ and published in the *British Medical Journal* in September 1950.

The conclusions of this Report and the most startling figures obtainable therefrom have been emphasized in the leading Article of the same number of that Journal. It is indeed startling to realize that the deaths from cancer of the lung, which can be attributed in considerable part to the increase in cigarette smoking, have increased more than *fifteenfold in the past twenty-five years*, the deaths being 612 in 1922 and 9,287 in 1947 for England and Wales.

With this heavy increase in the incidence and deaths from cancer of the

¹Would some ardent hygienist or smoker care to check these figures, to refute or confirm them and finally to let the Journal have an interesting or even a provocative article on the subject.

²This note was written in early October for our November make-up, but, as all readers will now have realized, publication has been much delayed by the trade dispute.

³Smoking and Carcinoma of the Lung, Preliminary Report. By Richard Doll, M.D., M.R.C.P., and A. Bradford Hill, Ph.D., D.Sc. *B.M.J.*, September 30, 1950, pp. 739-748.

lungs in the general population there must presumably be a concurrent increase in the Services and Service medical officers must perforce bear in mind the possibility of this diagnosis in obscure cases of "*Chest trouble.*" Furthermore, surely *the limitation of cigarette smoking* should be a duty or at least a desirable part of the work of medical and welfare officers and of true hygienists with a view to the prevention of cigarette induced cancer.

Matters of Interest

I

THE Director-General, Army Medical Services on the invitation of Major-General Guy B. Denit, Medical Corps, U.S. Army, Chief Surgeon, European Command visited the U.S. zone of Germany from September 15 to 20, 1950.

He visited many field medical units of the Medical Corps, including an evacuation hospital, a field hospital and a clearing company. During the manœuvres the chain of evacuation from the front line to the Evacuation Hospital, which corresponds to our Casualty Clearing Station, was followed. The medical equipment was a point of interest and amongst items seen were new types of immersion water heaters for use in the field and cooking apparatus. The Director-General also visited one of the static general hospitals of the U.S. Medical Corps at Frankfurt.

II

THE Director-General of the Canadian Army Medical Services, Brigadier W. L. Coke, came on a visit to this country and also attended the British manœuvres in Germany. Brigadier Coke's programme included the R.A.M.C. Depot, the R.A.D.C. Depot, the Q.A.R.A.N.C. Depot, the Army School of Health, the R.A.M.C. College and the Q.A. Military Hospital, Millbank. A Cocktail Party in his honour was given in the Headquarters Mess on October 9.

III

THE D.G.A.M.S. inspected 26 Field Ambulance at the Army School of Health, Mytchett on September 25, 1950.

The Field Ambulance was drawn up on parade under the command of Lieut-Colonel A. MacLennan, *O.B.E.*, R.A.M.C.

After the inspection the Field Ambulance marched passed and the D.G. gave a short address stressing the importance of health discipline and wishing them good luck and a safe return.

The other regular officers who are accompanying the unit are Major E. Gareh of the Field Surgical Team, Major W. B. Hubbard and Major W. S. Y. Mackay, Dental Officers of the Mobile Dental Team, and two non-medical officers, Captain (QM) L. H. Osborne and Captain W. J. James. The remainder of the officers are Short Service Reservists who have been called up for service. Many of the men on parade were Reservists with a considerable amount of war service.