

PUBLIC HEALTH

Malaria Toll Unnecessary

Failure of unit commanders to carry out health order to take atabrine twice a week cost Seventh Army almost 500 men a month in African campaign.

► BECAUSE unit commanders failed to carry out a health order to take atabrine twice a week, the Seventh Army lost thousands of its men to malaria during the African campaign in World War II.

The actual malaria rate in part of 1943 was 30 per 1,000 men which on a divisional basis means almost 500 men a month in the Seventh Army. About as many more were evacuated with "fever of unknown origin" which was in reality malaria.

This example of unnecessary loss of fighting men during a campaign was given by Dr. Perrin H. Long of the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, at the meeting of the Association of Military Surgeons in New York.

The responsibility for maintaining health in any military unit, he pointed out, rests on the commander of the unit. The medical officer may and should advise on all health matters, but it is up to the commanding officer to issue orders and see that they are carried out.

The Seventh Army example, Dr. Long said, "is but one of a number of instances which could be cited as examples in which a lack of command responsibility resulted in serious losses of manpower at the height

of combat."

Medical science has made such strides in prevention of disease that the Armed Services could establish maximal permissible disease rates for certain diseases. If a unit had more cases of such disease than the permitted rate, the commander could and should be disciplined, Dr. Long declared.

The British Army has followed this procedure since 1945. One British unit commander was actually relieved of his command because of an excessive malaria rate within his unit.

Dr. Long also advises that when an officer's efficiency is being considered in connection with his promotion, the health record of his unit should be studied.

Establishment of maximal permissible disease rates and disciplinary action against commanders in whose units these rates are exceeded may seem "revolutionary," Dr. Long said. But, he added, they "would appear definitely desirable in a day when military manpower is such a critical item in our program for national security.

"He who wastes it should not go unscathed," quipped Dr. Long.

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MICROBIOLOGY

Mildew-Resistant Fabrics

► NEW cotton fabrics that will stand up in the jungle to mildew and rot are the goal of tests by the Army Quartermaster Corps and U. S. Department of Agriculture around the world.

Anti-mildew cloth is badly needed by the armed forces for tents and uniforms that will not fall apart after a short stay in hot, tropical regions. During World War II, fabric losses to the tiny organisms that cause fiber decay were drastic. Tentage, clothing and other equipment, particularly in the South Pacific, fell victim to molds and fungi at an alarming rate.

To test various new anti-mildew chemicals, at least four exposure stations will be set up in widely separated parts of the world. Experiments will be carried out over the next several years at these stations.

One will be in New Orleans. There, test fabrics will be treated with various fungicides by scientists at the Agriculture Department's Southern Regional Research Laboratory, and part of the cloth will be exposed to the humid, subtropical Louisiana weather.

A hot-and-dry test station will be established by the Quartermaster Corps at Las Cruces, N. Mex., to test fabrics under desert conditions. Other exposure centers are to be overseas, one probably in the Caribbean, the other in the South Pacific for severe tropical conditions.

From the actual weathering experiments, the scientists hope to check the validity of test-tube methods for predicting fabric resistance to rot and mildew. The experiments will also provide the most extensive data ever collected on the actual effectiveness of anti-mildew, anti-rot chemicals on cotton cloth.

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GENETICS

Inherited Abnormalities Bar to Marriage

► PEOPLE born with slight physical abnormalities should not marry other people with similar abnormalities if they intend to have children. This warning was issued by Dr. E. B. Ford, Oxford University geneticist,

at the conference in London on "The Biological Hazards of Atomic Energy."

Dr. Ford said slight abnormalities may indicate that a person carries a damaged gene which is partly neutralized by the presence of its normal counter-part.

However, the children of two such persons may inherit a damaged gene from each parent and, under this double dose, they may be doomed to extreme physical deformity.

As an example of this type of hereditary abnormality Dr. Ford mentioned brachydactyly, which is an abnormal shortness of the fingers and toes.

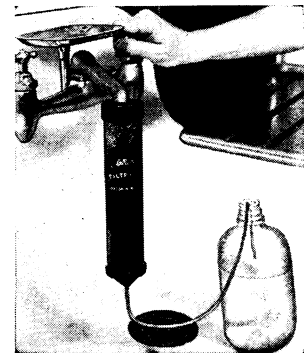
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