

PSYCHOLOGY

Torture Schools No Help

So-called School of Survival does not prepare soldiers to withstand brainwashing if captured, Dutch psychiatrist active in World War II underground charges.

► ATTEMPTS to harden American soldiers in a school of torture, euphemistically called a School of Survival, will not serve to prepare them to endure brainwashing if they should fall into enemy hands.

This is the conclusion of Dr. Joost A. M. Meerloo, Dutch psychiatrist now at Columbia. Dr. Meerloo was active in the Dutch underground during World War II where he learned first-hand of totalitarian inquisitions and brainwashing methods. He also tried in some cases to strengthen, by psychological methods, important members of the underground for what they must endure in the event of capture.

When the soldier is at the mercy of a cruel enemy, his record of success in going through "ghoulish exercises" will not help him, Dr. Meerloo states in "The Rape of the Mind." (See p. 76.)

He needs a "mental backbone."

The totalitarian inquisitors do not need to use torture to uncover the secrets of man's mind, although they may use these methods for their private pleasure, Dr. Meerloo says.

What the inquisitors especially require in order to succeed is that the prisoner be a dumbbell with a soldier's need to conform; that he be ridden with anxiety, and lacking in patience.

The school that teaches only torture and evasion techniques can even arouse latent anxieties in the soldier and thus, paradoxically, make it easier for him to surrender to brainwashing.

"The hero at school can become a weakling as soon as he is faced with the real challenge," Dr. Meerloo states.

Dr. Meerloo, who served as an expert witness in the trial of Col. Schwable, is critical of trying men accused of succumbing to brainwashing.

"A man cannot be forced to become a hero," he says. "It is ridiculous to punish him if he is not. It is as pointless as punishing him for bleeding or fainting."

Dr. Meerloo quotes a Dutch Court of Honor established to judge members of the underground who, after torture by the Nazis, had confessed and betrayed their compatriots.

"No man can possibly vouch for it that under no circumstances will he 'confess,' 'cooperate' or 'betray' his country," the Court concluded. "No man who has not himself gone through the hell which Communists and Nazis have been so able to organize has any right to judge the conduct of a man who did."

"Psychological torture is more effective in many cases than physical torture. This is

all the more true of the victim who has above average intellectual background. It seems that intelligence makes physical torture more easily bearable but at the same time exposes one more to the impact of mental torture. * * *

"There is not the slightest reason for shame, nor for considering such a person incapacitated for giving leadership. On the contrary, more than outsiders he will know what superhuman strength is required to resist the subtle methods of mental torture, and more than outsiders he can be helpful to others to prepare themselves for the ordeal as far as that is at all possible."

Dr. Meerloo's investigations have shown clearly, he says, that the men who can resist the enemy, who can maintain their strength under marginal circumstances, are the men who never feel that they are alone.

As long as they can think of their loved ones at home, as long as they can look forward to seeing them again, as long as they know their families are faithfully waiting

for them, they can maintain their strength and keep the unconscious drive to give in from taking over their lives.

"People in whom a religious faith or a political conviction is a deeply rooted, living thing have this same sense of belonging, of being needed, of being loved."

Science News Letter, August 4, 1956

BOTANY

Nurture Rare Plant to Discover Its Life Secret

► A PLANT, the only one of its kind ever reported, is being nurtured to find out how it lives.

The organism, as yet unidentified, is described as an unusual branched filamentous plant, superficially resembling a water mold. It was found growing under ten feet of water in complete darkness.

The plant was attached to the insulation of a cable in the ninth cavern of the Wookey Hole Caves, near Wells, Somerset. It was discovered by Dr. R. E. Davies.

Drs. F. E. Round and A. J. Willis of the department of botany at the University of Bristol, England, report in *Nature* (July 28) that the plant is like a fungus in some respects and unlike a fungus in other respects.

No reproductive organs have been found. The scientists are now trying to keep the plant alive on various media to discover its life secrets.

Science News Letter, August 4, 1956



"AVALANCHE" DIODE—Dr. H. S. Veloric of Bell Telephone Laboratories is testing a medium-power "avalanche" diode. This particular unit breaks down at 20 volts, and is capable of dissipating six watts. Abruptness of the "avalanche" effect can be seen from the oscilloscope trace. Devices having this characteristic are useful in voltage regulation or control devices and as voltage reference elements.