

Time heals post-Nam depression

The psychological aftershocks of war have been documented and often anticipated by behavioral and social scientists. In a one-year follow up of more than 900 Vietnam veterans after their return to the United States in 1971, researchers from Washington University in St. Louis found that veterans — particularly those who had been through combat — experienced noticeably more depressive symptoms than a matched control group of non veterans.

Comparatively little is known, however, about longer term effects of war and combat; several studies of World War II veterans have yielded conflicting results. Now the same Washington University team reports on a three-year follow up of 600 randomly selected Vietnam vets. The study, which compares the veterans with 300 civilians, matched for factors such as age, education and size and location of hometown, was presented at the recent meeting of the American Psychiatric Association.

Researchers John E. Helzer, Lee N. Robins, Eric Wish and Michi Hesselbrock defined depression as dysphoria (a state of feeling unwell or unhappy) for at least a month during the second or third years following the return, along with three or more simultaneous depressive symptoms out of a list of nine, including insomnia, anorexia and weight loss, loss of energy or

interest, guilt feelings, poor concentration, crying spells, thoughts of death or self-harm and worry about insanity.

The results "suggest that the Vietnam war produced few long-term psychological effects of the type we inquired about," they report. "We are unable to find much evidence of long-term depressive symptoms or syndromes which might be attributed to the military experience."

Also in contrast to the first follow-up study, the group "found that combat played an insignificant role in the veterans' psychological adjustment three years after their return to the States. However," they add, "in a war like Vietnam in which there were no 'front lines' and even those stationed within major cities lived under the threat of bombardment, it is not clear what constitutes a combat experience as might have been the case in previous conflicts."

Nevertheless, the first study did find that combat was a relatively strong predictor of depressive syndrome for up to one year after the Vietnam pullout. And "the association between combat and depression at the second follow up was weaker and does not continue to be significant after controlling for relevant pre-service variables," the researchers say.

"The results of these two studies provide some evidence that combat as a stressful life event did predict depressive syndromes in Vietnam veterans," they suggest. "However, these depressions were short-lived, and the effect of combat as a predictor diminished over time." □

Mixed chromosomes of mice and men



White coat areas derive from hybrid cell.

It looks all mouse, but it may be a little bit human. That mouse and at least two others born last summer at Jackson Laboratory in Bar Harbor, Maine, are partly derived from cells containing a human chromosome. They provide a step toward studying human genes in laboratory animals.

Such techniques could eventually allow biologists to locate the genes on human chromosomes, Peter C. Hoppe says. Currently, scientists can map the chromosomes in laboratory grown cells, but have the problem that the chromosomes, in cell culture, tend to lose segments.

The preliminary mouse-human results, reported in the April PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, are the result of collaboration among three laboratories. The procedure is based on the ability of some cancer cells to participate in normal development of an embryo (SN: 4/16/77, p.246). Carlo M. Croce of the Wistar Institute in Philadelphia fused human and mouse cancer cells. The viable hybrids quickly lose most human, but not mouse, chromosomes. Croce selected cells retaining human chromosome 17.

In Bar Harbor, Hoppe and visiting researcher Karl Illmensee injected a hybrid cell into the center of early mouse embryos (blastocysts) and transferred each embryo into a foster mother. Seventeen of the 49 mice born have now been analyzed.

The hybrid cells can participate in development of mice. In three of the mice examined, substantial amounts of tissue were derived from the fused cells, in a total of seven internal organs and the coat.

Whether the human chromosome is still present and active in those mice is not yet known. A specifically human enzyme activity was weakly detected only in two tissues. The researchers suggest that their test might not be sensitive enough, the human chromosome may be lost during cell divisions or mouse gene products may suppress human gene activity.

In his laboratory at the University of Geneva, Illmensee plans to look for human gene activity in the remaining mice and to examine the tissues for human chromosome 17. The researchers feel their results provide a feasible strategy for studying human gene expression. □

Stone Age tribe found... Never mind



Wide World Photo

It was touted last week by the Philippine government as a significant new discovery of a 30-family tribe living inside an extinct volcano crater in the Palawan Province. A few days later, however, officials in Manila acknowledged that the Tao't Bato, or "stone people," was the same group discovered in 1963 and named Ken-ey by an American anthropologist, Robert Fox. Philippine representatives in Washington could offer no explanation for the puzzling turn of events. "We're completely in the dark about it," said Tony Ramualdez, the embassy's cultural officer.