

PSYCHIATRY

You Can Take It

Even If Bombs Should Start Dropping, You Won't Be Scared To Death; Even Hysterical Do Not Die of Panic

By MARJORIE VAN DE WATER

EVEN if American cities should be subjected to air attack, Americans need not be afraid of hysteria or panic.

You will not be "scared to death" even if bombs should start dropping in your neighborhood. This reassurance is offered by Dr. John A. P. Millet, chairman of the Committee on Morale of the American Psychoanalytic Association, in answer to a query by Science Service.

"While it has been known that in certain altogether exceptional situations the emotion of fear has been supposed to cause death," Dr. Millet said, "the air raid situation is not one of those in question."

"It is not impossible that individuals suffering from advanced disease of the brain or heart might die from 'shock' or 'heart failure' under the influence of a sudden acute terror. But these individuals are in danger of this same disaster under stress of any form of excitement. Consequently, their particular susceptibility to sudden death should not be quoted as a fate which faces large numbers of the population."

"On the contrary, the experiences of those who have been through the severest air raids have brought amazement to the observers at the power latent in human being to rally in the face of realistic danger and to lose all traces of anxiety in their eagerness for appropriate action."

"Even hysterical individuals do not die from sudden panic, because the body is so constituted that the mechanism of fainting removes those most susceptible to the effects of fear from consciousness of the danger."

Can Reassure People

The air raid warden, through his personal contact with individuals, can play an important part in reassuring them, Dr. Millet indicated.

"It is important to realize," he said, "that the Air Raid Warden has certain particular functions which can be exercised to promote the morale of the civilian population. These include:

"1. A realization that his aim is to

promote a sense of confidence that all proper precautions are being taken.

"2. Assurance to everyone in his post that he is the representative of the government and as such, will take care of whatever situation arises.

"3. The covering of every possible detail of preparation necessary in his post, including specific instructions as to whatever equipment is necessary, and, where pocketbooks are too slender to provide this equipment, to see that some means is found for furnishing it.

"4. Sufficient acquaintance with the individuals resident on his post to know which individuals are reliable for emergency assistance, how many children have to be considered, and how many invalids or bedridden individuals there are in each house."

Even though wardens must combat complacency among some of the people on his post, Dr. Millet warned against the negative suggestion of terror-arousing statements such as the following attributed to a chief air raid warden addressing his staff of assistant wardens:

"I believe we are going to die by the thousands here on these streets within six months . . . I have grave doubts that we are going to be able to protect ourselves, our civilian population. If we were bombed tonight, the people of the city would not know what to do."

"There would be hysterical people, people who would actually die from fear, standing up . . . Very few people burn to death. They are scared to death."

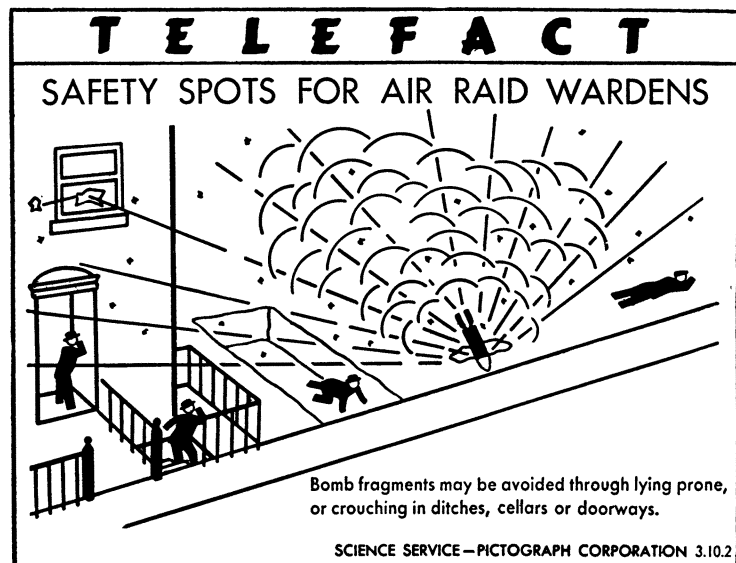
Such statements, Dr. Millet pointed out, emphasize unpreparedness and present fantasies rather than facts. Such statements, he said, fall into the mouths of Nazi propagandists as manna from the heavens. They are, furthermore, an admission of failure in executive authority which should have seen to it that no such unpreparedness was possible.

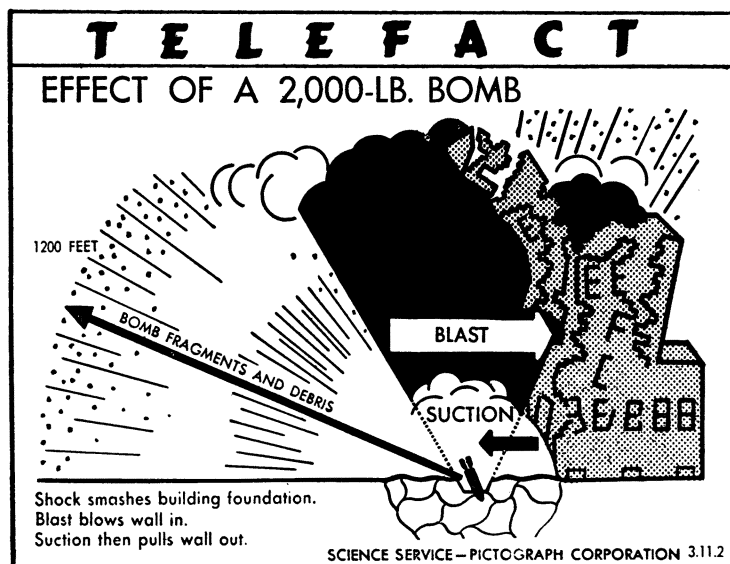
"The best remedy for complacency," Dr. Millet declared, "is the enlistment of individual effort for participation in the task that lies ahead."

Every Man Has Limit

"There is no absolute means of forestalling cases of panic in emotionally unstable individuals. Every human being has a point of resistance beyond which he can not maintain a perfect equilibrium. This fact should be quoted with no more emphasis than the fact that there is no absolute certainty of avoiding physical injuries, and should be supplemented by the statement that it has been the universal experience that the vast majority of people can rally their forces far beyond their own expectation when the hour of danger strikes. This statement holds for all individuals, including those who have doubts as to their ability to control their fears."

Selection for the post of air raid warden of any individual who is un-





stable or suffering from unrecognized emotional illness would endanger the whole system of civilian defense in that locality, it is pointed out by Dr. Millet.

Dr. Millet urges a more carefully worked out system of selection that would screen out undependable persons and press into service responsible individuals.

"Under the system now in operation in many cities," Dr. Millet said, "there are no qualifications for these jobs other than a willingness to serve, an apparently good physique, and, in the higher brackets, some form of political pull.

"No thought is wasted on the all important question of unrecognized emotional illness, or of an unstable temperament, which, while obviously a potential danger to the smooth operation of the whole system and to the civilian population, are often the very reasons which lead certain individuals to seek a position as Air Raid Warden.

Exclude Emotionally Unfit

"It would seem imperative that some screening device should be universally employed for the exclusion of the emotionally unfit, and that competent psychiatrists and psychologists should be appointed to a Committee on Standards for the selection of Air Raid Warden personnel.

"It would seem also that a house-to-house campaign should be conducted to impress into service responsible individuals whose record of adjustment in civilian life is at least as good as that of the average citizen.

"The question might well be raised

as to whether there is any dependable means of assuring the reliability of any individual in the face of a new and sudden type of emergency. While no criterion is infallible, it is none the less true that a proper set of screening devices would greatly minimize the possibility of emotional collapse among the Air Raid Wardens themselves. Knowledge of their task, a sense of responsibility for the welfare of others, and close familiarity with the personnel and habits of those under their immediate care would serve to build up their morale, and so to insure the likelihood of emotional preparedness for taking up the shock at the time when it is encountered.

"The civilian population in general needs to know on whom they are to depend, needs to be told what they are to do, needs to know the exact type of danger to which they may be exposed, and needs to be reassured as to all measures that will be taken for their protection in the event that a sudden attack deprives them of food, shelter, light, and water."

Science News Letter, April 25, 1942

ZOOLOGY

Rare Pygmy Whales Found On North Carolina Coast

PYGMIES exist among whales as well as among other animals. But a pygmy whale is a sizable animal compared with anything but a full-sized whale, the males measuring nine or ten feet in length and weighing 700 pounds.

Records of two such animals, washed

ashore in the region of the Carolina capes, are entered in a new publication of the Field Museum of Natural History (*Reviewed, SNL, this issue*). The description was written by Dr. Glover M. Allen of the Harvard University Museum of Comparative Zoology. The two little whales were dead when found. The injuries which they had suffered suggest that they may have fallen afoul of the propellers of U. S. Navy destroyers, on maneuver during the months before the outbreak of war.

A third specimen came ashore in Florida in 1940. Still alive, it was transferred to a big aquarium at Marineland, but it did not survive long.

The species is very little known, Dr. Allen states. It was not discovered until 1838, and in the 103 years since only 26 specimens have been placed on scientific record. These, however, have had a practically world-wide distribution.

Science News Letter, April 25, 1942

GEOPHYSICS

Veteran Geophysicist Honored With Bowie Medal

THE BOWIE Medal, highest honor in the special field of geophysics, was presented to Capt. N. H. Heck of the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey at the meeting of the American Geophysical Union in Washington. Until recently, Capt. Heck was chief of the Division of Geomagnetism and Seismology in the Survey; now he is Assistant to the Director of the Coast and Geodetic Survey, for Technical Matters.

This is the fourth award of the Bowie Medal, which was founded as a memorial to the late Dr. William Bowie of the Survey, famous for his researches on gravitational variations in and below the crust of the earth.

Science News Letter, April 25, 1942

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