

PSYCHIATRY

War Neurosis Effects

Even normal men may break under severe pressure. Psychiatrists can cure soldiers in early stages of mental collapse. Weary soldiers fall into trance.

► IN THIS war even the healthy, normal fighting man may break down under severe enough pressure.

But war neurosis, while not confined to the neurotically predisposed individual, is easily cured in its early stages. This statement, based on actual observation of war casualties, was made by Commander Uno H. Helgesson, U. S. Navy psychiatrist.

"We are all convinced of the importance of sulfa drugs for infections," he said. "Let's not forget that prompt psychiatric treatment for emotional breakdowns is equally vital."

Commander Helgesson pleads for an avoidance of the mistake made in the last war.

"Tens of thousands of soldiers could have been saved by a few hours' treatment," he said. "But war neuroses were neglected in the last war until it was too late. They became chronic cases."

The gruesome refinements of modern warfare which have produced Dunkirks, Pearl Harbors and Bataans, can push

human endurance to the breaking point. Commander Helgesson told of many fighting men who had shown incredible courage for days on end, suddenly collapsing after their job is done.

Two or three days after the actual danger is past, they often fall into a stupor, with no memory of their recent experience. Even a previously healthy soldier, if pushed too far, may suddenly go into a catatonic-like trance that would ordinarily be diagnosed as schizophrenia.

"Unless this soldier can be made to remember his frightful experience and to re-live it, he is in imminent danger of developing permanent symptoms." Commander Helgesson recommends hypnosis or one of the hypnotic drugs, such as sodium amytal, to induce memory.

"But this is only the beginning of treatment," he warned. "Cure depends on the skill of the psychiatrist in guiding and controlling the acting-out process, once the patient begins to talk.

"Under no circumstances should shock treatment of the insulin, metrazol or elec-

tric variety, be used in these cases," he said. "The patient is already suffering from shock, and can't take any more."

In comparing this war and the last, Commander Helgesson spoke of stupor states, associated with profound amnesia, as a characteristic type of emotional breakdown in the present conflict. He believes the hysterical, or conversion symptom so prevalent last time, is less effective now as a defense mechanism. There is no longer any rear, to which the soldier can be sent when he gets sick. With hospitals in constant danger of air bombardment, there is no safety anywhere. During the last war the instinctive, unconscious drive of the human organism to protect itself was often expressed by getting sick, and being sent behind the lines. From a Dunkirk or a Pearl Harbor there is no escape except by death, or perhaps by a state closely resembling death in which overwhelming danger and horror can be forgotten.

Science News Letter, August 29, 1942

ZOOLOGY

Zoo Gets Three Ancient African Fish Via Harvard

► THREE representatives of a very old family have arrived in Washington from Harvard. No, they aren't Mayflower descendants, called to give the government the benefit of their brains. In fact, although their mission is primarily educational, they have very little brains; and they came originally from Africa, anyway.

They are three fish, of an exceedingly ancient species, representing one of the oldest lines of living vertebrates. They are long and slim, like eels, but they are not at all closely related to eels, being nearer kin of our southern gars, which are among the most primitive of American fish. They are so seldom seen that they have no common name; zoologists call them *Calamachthys calabaricus*.

Their Odyssey, which has just wound up at the National Zoological Park in Washington, began at Lagos, in southern Nigeria, tropical Africa. A lot of them, captured there, were taken to the London Zoo. From London a number of specimens were sent to Dr. Thomas Barbour, of the Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology.

After keeping them on the Harvard campus for five years, Dr. Barbour sent three specimens to his friend Dr. William M. Mann, director of the National Zoological Park. They are between eight and twelve inches long, and are estimated to be seven or eight years old.

Science News Letter, August 29, 1942

MEDICINE

Vitamin D Forms Vary

► ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE that forms of vitamin D—viosterol and cod liver oil—vary widely in their ability to prevent tooth decay, is reported by Dr. E. C. McBeath and Dr. W. A. Verlin of New York in the *Journal of the American Dental Association* (Aug. 1).

Nearly twice as many vitamin D units of irradiated ergosterol or viosterol were required as of cod liver oil, to produce the same preventive effect. When the dose of viosterol was quadrupled, there was only a slight improvement in results.

Effectiveness of vitamin D, and especially cod liver oil, in preventing tooth decay was reaffirmed by the fact that a daily dose of 400 units, a little more than a teaspoonful of standard cod liver oil, reduced dental caries by nearly a half.

When this dosage of cod liver oil was

doubled, the decay was lowered by about two-thirds as compared with a group of children receiving no vitamin D supplement to their diets.

Some research workers claim that concentrated vitamin D is less effective than when given in a more dilute form. Drs. McBeath and Verlin, therefore, gave all dosages dispersed in a glass of chocolate milk.

Other research also indicates that the two forms of vitamin D, cod liver oil and viosterol, are really chemically different and can have different physiological effects.

"In our own studies," the research workers report, "which now comprise 120 children given supplements of irradiated ergosterol (viosterol), the effect, while always measurable, was uniformly unfavorable when compared with those from cod-liver oil therapy."

Science News Letter, August 29, 1942