

PSYCHIATRY

Guadalcanal Neurosis

New and unique psychiatric war illness is result of strain of Guadalcanal campaign as bad as Pearl Harbor and Dunkirk combined. No previous sign of break.

► “GUADALCANAL NEUROSIS” is the name under which a new and unique psychiatric malady, war-caused, will probably go down in medical history. The distressing neuro-mental disease, which afflicted a considerable group of Marines invalided back to this country for treatment, was introduced to members of the American Psychiatric Association meeting in Detroit by Lieut. Comdr. Edwin R. Smith, of the U. S. Naval Hospital at Mare Island, Calif.

Every one of the 500 officers and men invalided back to this hospital, though they came from widely different backgrounds, suffered exactly the same symptoms. No possible psychiatric screening tests at recruiting stations or boot camps, he indicated, would have revealed any sign that these men would break under combat conditions.

Yet the strain of the Guadalcanal campaign, as bad as Pearl Harbor and Dunkirk combined and far more prolonged, reduced the seasoned, tough U. S. Marine to a man who, weeks after, was frequently close to tears, jumped and ran from the room at the slightest noise, wore cotton in his ears, and on the transport coming home required physical restraint if there was test firing.

“Never before in history,” Commander Smith said, “have such a group of well-trained men been subjected to such conditions as the combat troops of the U. S. Marine Corps faced during the days following August 7, 1942.

“The strain and stress experienced by these men produced a group neurosis that has never been seen before and may never be seen again.”

The men did not exaggerate their trials and did not like to talk about them. When seen at the hospital three weeks after combat they said they were “much better.”

“But all of them in their composite story,” Commander Smith said, “give a picture of physical and mental strain that combines the best of Edgar Allen Poe and Buck Rogers.”

Significant, he said, is the fact that of all the men arriving at Mare Island with a diagnosis of war neurosis only 5%

came from Pearl Harbor, the other 95% coming from Guadalcanal.

Quiet, food and absolute rest were the chief features of the treatment. One of the first duties of the medical officers was to assure the men that no one could ever consider them cowards. Their trembling, nervous, upset state made them fear being thought yellow. It was pathetic, Commander Smith said, to see how grateful they were when being assured no one would think them yellow.

The period of rest should not be too prolonged or the men get restless, he said. They feel futile when working at the minor chores of occupational therapy. Decision as to their future should be made promptly and the men told of it immediately.

Most of those leaving the service should be able to return successfully to civil

life, Commander Smith said. Over 30% are being sent back to limited duty but in some cases there is a prompt return of the tension and anxiety state. A six months' period of duty in the United States before return to full duty is being tried but it is too soon yet to know how the men will stand up under this. Most of them do not know what they should or want to do except that they do not want to go back to Guadalcanal.

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No Panic on Wasp

► THE “MAGNIFICENT” behavior, with no panic at any time, of the men and officers on the aircraft carrier *Wasp* during action in combat areas and at the time of torpedoing and afterwards was described by Comdr. B. W. Hogan, the senior medical officer on board.

Only 9% reported feeling fearful and about one-third reported feeling excited, nervous, tense, and shocked immediately after the torpedo struck. Twelve hours later about half of them were fearful, apprehensive and nervous. By the time three weeks had passed, about one-third



BIG DAM—Conveyor belts play an important part in the building of this huge 444-foot earthen dam for the U. S. Bureau of Reclamation. Impervious clay for the core of the dam is brought from a borrow pit a mile and a half away by nine flights of Goodyear belts. After it is dumped at the site, it is spread in six-inch layers and tamped with sheepsfoot rollers, drawn by Diesel tractors. The earth which will be packed on both sides of the core will be drawn from two other pits. The upstream side of the dam will be reinforced with heavy stones for the dam's entire height.

stated they were nervous, apprehensive and jumpy but slightly under half said they felt normal and regretful.

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Blonds Crack in Tropics

► THE AVERAGE white man is not "geared to the tropics," and blonds are especially likely to crack, Lieut. Comdr. James L. McCartney declared. Of twelve cases he described, of men invalidated back to the United States from the tropics in the present war, all with diagnosis of nervous and mental sickness, all were blonds.

They had headaches, scary dreams, low blood pressures, were easily tired, depressed, restless, had hallucinations and lapses of memory.

Why blonds are less able to stand the tropics was not explained but it may be because their skins are less able to withstand the intense sunlight. Comdr. McCartney quoted another scientist who had observed the effects of the tropics before the war and wrote that "tropical irritability is mostly due to the constant bombardment of the sun, for it is worse in blonds."

Science News Letter, May 22, 1943

Sports Prevent War Breaks

► MODERN EMPHASIS on raising a child to be self-reliant, and modern emphasis on success in dangerous sports such as skiing, wrestling, boxing and mountaineering has made today's soldiers much better able "to take it" than their fathers in the last war, Dr. Rene A. Spitz of New York City, declared. This new trend in child rearing, which in about 1910 turned away from the protective attitude of parents of the Gay Nineties, is responsible, he believes, for a greatly reduced number of neurotic disorders in today's army.

Less rigid military discipline, he said, is another factor helping to prevent the breakdowns that were frequent in the last war. The soldier today does not have to fight a fifth column in his own psyche, the fear of "funking" which caused nervous breakdown in his father in the trenches.

Nervous disorders can be prevented, Dr. Spitz suggested, by desensitizing the men to danger during their training if they have not already undergone this process when competing as children in dangerous physical sports.

Science News Letter, May 22, 1943

PSYCHIATRY

Acid for Epilepsy

Racemic glutamic acid added to normal diet to aid in warding off seizures. Electric shock treatment successful in treating middle-age illness.

► ANNOUNCEMENT of a new acidifying treatment for epilepsy and favorable reports on electric shock treatment for mental disorders of middle life were presented to the American Psychiatric Association meeting in Detroit.

The acidifying treatment for epilepsy was reported by Dr. H. Waelsch, Dr. J. C. Price and Dr. T. J. Putnam, of the New York Neurological Institute.

Methods of producing acidosis, such as starvation, protein- and fat-rich diets, exercise and drugs such as ammonium chloride have recognized value in treating seizures, or "fits," as the layman calls them, the New York scientists pointed out. Consequently they tried to prepare an acidifying substance which could be added to a normal diet over long periods of time.

Racemic glutamic acid, they found, "fulfills the requirements moderately well," and enhances the activity of other drugs given to ward off convulsions.

The benefits of electric shock treatments were stressed by a number of speakers. It is "the most useful treatment in severe cases of involuntal psychoses," declared Dr. Eugene Davidoff, of Willard, N. Y.

In 30 patients suffering from a severe form of this mental disorder which is associated with the change-of-life period, 37% were much improved and 77% showed some degree of improvement, he reported. None of these patients had been helped by previous treatment with glandular preparations.

Comparing it to metrazol shock treatment, Dr. Davidoff said that electric shock causes fewer complications and can be more safely used in older patients who have some hardening of the arteries. The patients are likely to have little or no memory of the treatment, and fear reactions are not as marked as after metrazol treatment. Insulin shock, he said, is neither as safe nor as effective in these cases.

Making this treatment less hazardous to the patients is a new technique of giving a simultaneous injection of curare and strychnine with electro-shock. Success in treating 55 women with this technique during the last two years was

reported by Dr. Marcel Heiman, of Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, State Hospital. The curare is said to have a "softening" effect on the convulsions induced by electric shock and the strychnine counteracts the effect of the curare in slowing the patient's breathing.

Comparing the value of electric shock treatment in chronic, slowly evolving states of mental disorder with its effect in those cases in which "something new and dramatic" appears as the main symptom, Dr. Abraham Myerson, of Boston, found that electric shock gives only temporary relief in the chronic disorders but in cases of sudden onset a good result may be expected.

Benzedrine sulfate, familiar as "pep pills" and the ingredient of some nasal inhalators, was tried as an epilepsy remedy by Dr. Samuel Livingston and Dr. Edward M. Bridge, of Baltimore. No ill effects and definite improvement in about 25% of their patients, mostly children, were observed.

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MEDICINE

Yellow Fever Virus Lingers in Monkey Brains

► YELLOW FEVER virus is capable of surviving for several months in the brains of monkeys that have been inoculated with it and recovered, two Brazilian researchers, Dr. H. A. Penna and Dr. A. Bittencourt, of the Laboratory of the Yellow Fever Research Service, Rio de Janeiro, report. (*Science*, May 14)

Three monkeys that had received brain inoculations, and had recovered after short bouts of fever, subsequently died in the laboratory, apparently from tuberculosis, a malady to which monkeys are susceptible. Material from their brains, inoculated into mice, caused meningitis in the latter animals. Immunological tests indicated that yellow fever virus was present.

The Yellow Fever Research Service is maintained jointly by the Brazilian government and the Rockefeller Foundation.

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