

THE MEDICAL MEN IN THE WAR GAME

WHY THE DEPARTMENT IS VITAL
IN WAGING BATTLE.

(A series of two articles on the status of the medical officer, by Captain Thomas S. Crowe, M. R. C., detachment commander of Camp Greene Base Hospital.)

An army is a machine, all the parts of which must functionate in perfect co-ordination.

This is so apparent that one would never think it could become a subject for dispute. The doctor, who is not thoroughly informed is ready either by words or actions to dispute it, and the professional soldier is ever ready to concede nothing to the doctor except his ability to concern himself in morbid processes.

In order that we may understand the relation of the medical department to the rest of the army, let us first define an army.

An army is an organized body of specialists existing for the purpose, definitely and singly, of exerting physical force against an enemy. Organization is a very apt personification of the value of specialization, and in every organism, vital or mechanic, there exists a mutual independency of specialized parts. A mechanical organism differs from a vital organism in one very essential particular, viz, that in the former each special part performs one and only one function, whilst in the latter each special part performs not only its own work, but is directly charged to a greater or lesser degree with the duty of aiding exercise of the function of every other part. Thus, in the human organism metabolism is the special function of the alimentary tract, but every duty in every special organ of the human body is vitally concerned with metabolic processes. The lung is the organ of respiration yet everyone knows that another organ of the human organization—the skin—has among others a respiratory function also.

The army is a vital organism comparable to the organism we have described. Each portion of this organism is not only dependent upon every other portion but the special function of each its parts is subject to every other part in greater or lesser degree.

Inability to recognize these important principles is chief if not only cause for inefficiency in man-controlled organizations. There is no jealousy between lungs and skin. Each in addition to doing its own work, works also for the body as a whole. The moment either failed to perform its function as part of the body as a whole, and attempted to confine its workings to its special functions we get disorganization of the body as a whole, and if it continues death is inevitable. In some way there should be no misunderstanding between the medical department and the so-called "combatant department" of the army, because the moment either fails to perform its special function disruption begins, the

organization is weakened and destruction through the channels of inefficiency is the result. In other words, the medical department of the army is charged with specialized functions that are not peculiar to itself but are performed by every other part of the army. The combatant forces are likewise charged with specialized functions that are common to all other parts of the army organism. Failure to perform that specialized function means death. Failure to perform other general functions spells inefficiency. If experience counts aught, if history itself is not a dream, it can be very truthfully said that the success of armies in the field bears a very definite ratio to the degree in which the medical department of the army is allowed to perform, not only its own specialties, but also to perform those functions common to every soldier—line or staff. Only ignorance or wilful perversion of truth alone combats these facts.

The attitude of the doctor just fresh from practice in civil life is easily explained. Things military have been foreign to all of us. Particularly is this true of the doctor above all men. He of all men lives a life that diverges from, instead of concentrating towards, the development of team work. He is least skilled and thinks less is any line of endeavor foreign to his immediate medical specialty. He can not conceive of doing anything that would not include in some way the relief of sickness. War to the doctor means wounds, splints and disease. To the professional soldier, war means guns, shells and bayonets. The doctor wants to be taken to the Regimental Aid Station at once, and it requires no small amount of training to bring about in him the necessary mental gymnastics that turn his thoughts towards ways and means of any kind that would bring the wounded to his dressing station and to properly dispose of them. When the average doctor is told that the Medical Department itself must effect this movement he is amazed. When you suggest that the same Medical Department must maintain and control in a military manner the organization upon which the movement depends, he fails utterly to grasp the idea.

Finally when you inform him that the Medical Department must, the doctors must, organize and perfect a highly trained military organization, capable of caring for itself, capable of marching and performing every function of the soldier, including the care of asses, mules and motor trucks, he becomes speechless and he gasps as Colonel Page would say, "monstrous." Such is the duty of the Medical Military Man as you of broadened vision now begin to realize and until you reach that view-point you are of the inefficiency bearing kind. Those of us who have actually reached it have become a co-ordinate part of the army, willing and ready to exercise the common function of all soldiers as well as our own specialized functions.

Concluded in next issue.

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