

VETERANS ARE NOT PROBLEM CHILDREN

By T/SGT. DAVID DEMPSEY, USMC

WE GOT off the plane at San Francisco and stepped into the clean, tangy air of a city where already men were gathering to decide the fate of the world. We were home. None of us could quite believe it. No one said much; there was too much to say. A young Marine, who had spent thirty-one months on lonely outposts, fought back tears as a chord deep inside him vibrated to the familiar sound of America. An officer said: "I feel as though a door had been closed on two years of hell."

We went our several ways, wearing our newly acquired ribbons, looking very much the returning veterans. At a restaurant I was joined by a retired Navy officer who begged my pardon for intruding and later insisted on paying for my meal. (Overseas, of course, we would not have eaten at the same table.) A hotel barber, after washing my hair, proudly refused a tip. At every city on our way east Red Cross workers even more than usual encumbered me with help. But it was not until an old friend of mine — a woman — looked at me sceptically

and said, "But are you all right?" that a glimmer of what was happening dawned on me.

"Of course," I replied, "why shouldn't I be?"

"But what you've been through — it must be terrible. . . ."

"That is all in the past," I said.

"But haven't you been in one of the rehabilitation centers?" she inquired. I had only vaguely heard of these. She told me they were places where returning servicemen "had their language cleaned up, were instructed on how to act around civilians" and otherwise restored to normalcy.

My friend's attitude is typically that of too many mothers and wives who expect the worst of their men when they come home. The advice they are getting from various magazine and newspaper "authorities" on the subject of adjusting returning servicemen is in danger of turning them into kitchen psychologists determined to "cure" the veteran — even at the cost of his sanity.

One such article, in a magazine

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reaching several million persons, warns the women of the nation to expect their men to be discourteous ("Nobody says 'please' and 'thank you' in an army"); unable to make their own decisions and yet rebellious against authority and in need of an "outward prop to their will"; bored, because of an "annihilation of the will"; and "edgy, unpredictable, overly intense and violent in speech, with some tendency to explode into violent action." Mothers must give their sons "time to recover" and wives should make "a thorough study of the psychology of the veteran," organizing into discussion groups and securing professional help if it is available.

Fortunately, these alarmist doctrines have already given rise to an opposite school which recommends doing nothing whatever for the veteran. He is assumed to be a person whom the searing experiences of war have not altered. Let him join a veteran's organization, parade up Main Street a couple of times a year, and go on a toot. A prominent New York minister, returning from a tour of our armies in Europe last spring, expressed this view when he said that all the soldier needs when he comes back is to "sit under the apple tree in his back yard for a few days."

Some veterans — a small percentage who may slip through the Army and Navy's screening process — *will* need psychiatric treatment as civilians. And, too, the job of readjustment will be more difficult emotionally for the crippled and disfigured.

At the other end of the scale, however, some men will bounce back into peacetime life with little or no help whatever. But the great majority will fall somewhere between. The apple tree will not be sufficient in itself, but neither will mothers and wives need to become attendants to a class of mental cases. Their adjustment will be normal, but it will require some guidance and understanding.

II

It is only reasonable to expect the soldier to be changed when he returns. This, in itself, should not be alarming. He would be abnormal indeed if the impact of battle, the confinement and regimentation of military life, did not leave an imprint on him. Millions of young men, furthermore, will have grown up in the service: they would have changed in any event. So far as the war is concerned, the amount and kind of change will depend greatly on the type of person the veteran was before he joined the service; on whether or not he saw actual combat; on where he was stationed (England is quite different from New Guinea!). The range of his reactions will vary no more than that of the civilian: he may simply have more of them — more moments of fear, loneliness, depression, frustration. These do not lead to neuroses for most of us in civilian life; nor do they for the soldier.

In the Pacific, where seven or eight million men will see duty before the

war ends, climate, disease, isolation, and a fanatic enemy necessitate profound readjustments. Some of these changes will be permanent; others are temporary and will disappear under normal living. Some are bad and others are good! Let us consider the changes apparently most feared by jittery writers, many of whom seem to have gained their knowledge of the veteran on Wednesday nights at the Stage Door Canteen.

A common assumption is that the veteran will be rude and overbearing. If your soldier was not in the habit of saying "please" and "thank you" when he enlisted, it is not likely that he will have acquired these outward manifestations of courtesy while he was away. Barracks and battlefield do not encourage polite talk; an army, like a mule, moves ahead under the stimulus of a little sensible profanity. Likewise, a foxhole does not encourage graceful living; nor a K ration dinner, table manners.

On the other hand, the fighting man, despite his rough and tumble life, learns a fundamental courtesy dictated by the needs of a society in which men must live at close quarters, with no choice of companions. I believe that soldiers, particularly those close to battle where they share a common danger, are kinder and basically more considerate of each other than civilians.

A second assumption is that the veteran will come back the product of such complete regimentation that his will power will be gone. The days

when an army consisted of enlisted men who merely took orders while the officers did all the thinking is gone. While ultimate leadership is still invested in the officer class, the specialized nature of modern war has distributed some degree of autonomy throughout the ranks. Radio operators, tank drivers, artillery observers, gun crews (to select a few military occupations at random) are "on their own" much of the time. The chances are your soldier is making more decisions — and more responsible ones — than ever before in his life.

Another unwarranted fear is that the returning serviceman will be overcome with boredom and crave coarse entertainment. The old saying that war is "organized boredom" is still largely true. Millions of soldiers, sailors and Marines, isolated on shipboard or some coral atoll, sweat out a war they never see. There will be, therefore, a lot of things the veteran will want to get out of his system, emotional blanks he will want to fill up. Think of a tightly compressed spring which is suddenly released. It will bounce around before coming to a stop. So may the soldier. This does not mean that war has made him a maladjusted personality. He just needs a chance to let off steam.

War coarsens men — but not irrevocably. The Army and Navy's special services division fight this tendency with an extensive recreational program reaching men even in the most remote jungle outposts. Our

soldiers, sailors and Marines have access to musical instruments and athletic equipment; they can listen to American radio programs relayed to them by stations throughout the Pacific; they receive "pony" editions of American magazines by first-class mail, bringing them news almost as fast as those at home get it; they may see a different current movie every night (except during actual combat). A great many have learned to read books for the first time in their lives, thanks to plenty of leisure and an adequate supply of reading material. A large percentage of servicemen spend months of their time in special schools — even overseas — where they not only acquire new skills but broader interests.

I realize that all this can be made to sound very nice on paper; the truth is, that while they do not take the place of home, they keep life in the service from being the great emotional and intellectual desert it might otherwise be. (Indeed, the jungle has in this respect not changed the soldier so much as he has changed the jungle.) There is no reason to believe the veteran will come home unable or unwilling to appreciate the good things of life; having gone without them for so long, he may well prize them a little higher.

Perhaps the most dangerous accusation made against the veteran is that he will be addicted to violence when he returns to civilian life. Yet only one serviceman in five sees actual combat. And even for that one, war

is quite impersonal. He may hate the enemy but it is not with a psychopathic hate that will carry over into postwar living. The scheme of violence which war necessarily imposes on men for sheer survival is left behind when they return. Even on the battlefield, these "killers" will treat a captured enemy soldier quite decently. An Australian newspaper correspondent said to me once: "If you Americans don't kill your enemies with bullets first, you kill them with kindness later."

Moreover, the services foster *rational* relationships within the ranks for the sake of the harmony so necessary to a fighting organization. Patience is one thing a soldier acquires if nothing else. "Authorities" to the contrary, I think wives may be surprised to find that their husbands will be quite agreeable persons when they come home.

III

The danger of regarding every veteran as a "problem" is that it may actually turn him into a problem. Consider this case, taken from the files of a social work agency, involving a young man's readjustment to civilian life among a family that understood "not wisely but too well." The boy had an involuntary fear of sudden, loud noises — not an uncommon reaction among men who have been under fire. His mother lavished such solicitude on him that he became conscious of what had been before only a minor

disturbance. "When she offered me a glass of milk," the young man told the case worker, "it was as though she thought I was going to die." His father, on the other hand, upbraided him for being a sissy and letting noises "get him down." His wife was worried and tended to withdraw from him.

A veterans' bureau placed him in office work to keep him away from noise, but his lack of experience made it hard for him to carry on. He lost confidence in himself, and in the course of a year held nine different jobs. This, in turn, increased the difficulties of his home life. The resulting conflicts drove him into the arms of a psychiatrist and the family to a social work agency. Although the boy had successfully lived with his symptoms for months before he returned home, his family's attitude quickly broke him down.

This is an extreme case, but a warning of what can happen if families regard every emotional disturbance with alarm. The veteran *is* a case in the sense that his emotional reactions can be typed. But then so is the non-veteran, for the majority of us carry minor psychoneurotic symptoms with us all through life. The veteran may simply have more of his share of these for some time; war intensifies such normal experiences as fear, depression, sorrow, shock, boredom.

The average fighting man has enormous resilience. Without losing the human qualities that have given this war a special meaning, he learns to ad-

just himself to a world where the positive values of civilization are turned inside out. Refinements, niceties are lost. But fundamental virtues tend to remain, even though submerged in the stream of military necessity. His sense of humor remains, too, which is another way of saying that a soldier keeps his balance.

From my own observation, the areas of emotional adjustment in which the returning veteran may need help—sympathetic understanding, essentially—are the following:

(1) The most serious difficulty he may face (but one which will apply to the smallest group of men) will be the reopening, under certain stresses of civilian life, of "shock" wounds which he suffered in battle. The "startle" reaction (fear of sudden noise) is an example of this. A friend of mine, now discharged, cannot sit through a movie bombing scene, for he once experienced a terrible bombing in which he nearly lost his life. In every other respect he is normal. He is gradually overcoming this psychological hazard, as are thousands of others, without psychiatric help. Don't worry such a person into thinking he is a "case."

(2) The veteran may experience a sense of isolation during his first few months home, after the initial thrill wears off. His old life, interrupted by the war, will have passed on, seemingly leaving him in the backwash. He may feel lonely and left out. His old job, if it is waiting for him, may seem strange, his old skill rusty. But

an understanding — on the part of family, friends and employers — of what he has given up while they have led normal lives can bridge the gap that psychologically separates “veteran” from “civilian.”

(3) Married men will have the “problem,” in addition to everything else, of resuming their marital lives. Depending on the wife, this can be a positive advantage, for the veteran will be able to go back to a more settled and emotionally stable routine. A wife can make her husband’s adjustment easy, not by “psyching” him, but with a little pre-Freudian love and understanding. The chances are he will respond to this as to nothing else; it is what he has missed most in his years away from home.

(4) Some of the veteran’s values will be changed, and he may challenge certain accepted civilian values. This will require adjustment by civilian and serviceman both. I know a young veteran who, when he returned, found it impossible to take up the frivolous life that he and his fiancée had enjoyed before the war. The girl expected the same carefree boy who had left her three years before. Instead, she found a mature man with new insights and values. Because she inter-

preted this as lack of affection, their romance failed.

In that strange world where life and death share a common ground, men shed the husk of hypocrisy by which so much of our ordinary world lives. Social prestige will seem less important to the corporal from Park Avenue who served under a captain from the lower East Side. Race and nationality differences evaporate when they meet in the same foxhole and dodge the same bullets. The complacency of the civilian’s world seems wrong to the man who may have gone for months without fresh food. In many instances, the veteran will want to say, “It is you who must change, too, not only we.”

The men and women who stayed at home must be prepared to meet the veteran halfway. They must come to realize that in many respects he will come back a better man, qualified to make a sounder peacetime contribution by the very sacrifices he has made in fighting for our future. It will be a tragedy indeed if this — one of the few prizes war can offer — should be lost because our misinformed public insists on treating veterans as today’s problem children. From this group tomorrow’s leaders must emerge.



*I*T is the free man who must win freedom for the slave; it is the wise man who must think for the fool; it is the happy who must serve the unhappy.

— JEAN PAUL RICHTER

NATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN HUMOR

By H. J. EYSENCK

THOUGH man will freely admit to lacking the wisdom of Socrates, the beauty of Apollo, or the strength of Hercules, he will fight to the death anyone who denies him a sense of humor. He will not be at all sure what he means by a sense of humor — ask a hundred people and you get a hundred different answers. But he is quite certain that to be told he has no sense of humor is a deadly insult, to be avenged forthwith, and not something he can afford to laugh about indulgently.

And as of individual people, so of nations. In his essay, *Of Poetry*, Temple pointed out in 1692 that true humor is to be found only in England, and ever since that day each nation has reiterated that claim in its own favor. Other nations may have certain queer, childish, perverted and unintelligible substitutes; the real article is only to be found at home. In war, this belief becomes a weapon of propaganda: allies are grudgingly admitted to have at least the rudiments of “true” humor — though not so good as ours — while the foe is utterly humorless. Because humor is taken as the highest human

distinction, obviously those who do not have it are subhuman.

Thus in this war — as in the last — propagandists assiduously suggested that *Germans have no sense of humor*. And similarly, the Nazis screamed from the housetops that *Jews have no sense of humor* — that it was reserved for true blue-eyed Germans, like Herr Streicher, Jew-baiter Number One. Jews also often believe that there is a specifically “Jewish” type of humor — vastly superior, of course, to “Gentile” varieties. Americans believe that the English are dull-witted as to humor; the English think the French comic, but not humorous; the French think American humor pointless and vulgar.

Yet Shakespeare’s comedies are as popular in Berlin and Moscow as they are in London. Shaw used to be a German favorite. French comic films have found a world-wide public. Charlie Chaplin, London-born, conquered America. Mark Twain was a best seller on the European continent. Jokes in representative German, French, English, Danish, Norwegian, American,

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