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MEDICAL COMMENTARY ON SPECIAL ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS STOMACH BATTALIONS AND STOMACH DIVISIONS

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HISTORICAL DIVISION EUROPEAN COMMAND
Operational History Branch

Dr. Scherf
Generalarzt

MEDICAL COMMENTARY ON SPECIAL ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS STOMACH BATTALIONS AND STOMACH DIVISIONS

Translator: R. Otto

Editor: R. Otto

Hugo Seemueller
Lt Colonel

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Medical opinion of special units such as stomach battalions and divisions.

(Hugo Seemueller)

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Steinlager Allendorf 28 October 1946

Medical Commentary on Special Organizations Such As Stomach Battalions And Stomach Divisions

There is hardly another organ apt to show such a multitude and variation of symptoms of disease as the stomach. Already in peacetime the number of gastric diseases as against the overall figure of patients suffering from internal diseases was comparatively high and the same applies to an even greater extent to wartime. While the importance of military medicine is partly justified by this fact, it is still more emphasized by the rather difficult decisions the medical officer has to make on account of the overlapping of organic and functional complaints which is characteristic of stomach diseases. The exact diagnosis of an organic disease requires technical skill and professional qualifications of a very high standard as well as efficient and highly developped equipment. Moreover, the evaluation of the local findings by taking into account the overall personality of the patient, and its appreciation with regard to his fitness for service demand a psychologically trained medical experience. The latter is also a prerequisition for evaluating the influence of gastric diseases on the development of the personality as well as the influence of the latter on the organic disease. An optimal degree of the gastric patient's working

capacity can only be reached if the physician is able to determine and bring in accord the psychological overall attitude of his patients and the influences of the surroundings. A reasonable distribution of the gastric patients between military and civil services is the prerequisition for a rational employment of the working capacities the gastric patient had still retained. It should be mentioned that the enemy powers had similar opinions on this subject, which were expressed in their press, where the appearance of gastric diseases was spoken of as one of the "greatest medical problems" of the present war. (Hudchinson).

These were the reasons why the German Army Command had the gastric patients separated from the regular troops and gathered in stomach companies, battalions, etc. The assignment of specialized physicians with the necessary equipment seemed to be the best guarantee for the observance of the basis of every treatment of gastric diseases, like nursing care of the stomach, rest, heat and diet. In this connection the Chief Army Medical Inspector had repeatedly emphasized the fact that these special formations comprised exclusively individuals who were physically and mentally inferior and could only be used for close-order missions in the rear army areas. The following example shows that these circumstances were not always taken into consideration by the field forces.

First it should be added that there was a special hospital for gastric diseases in each military area where every gastric patient had to go through. Only these hospitals were authorized to make a decision as to the fitness for service and the grade. A report, which was to eliminate any doubts, was attached to the pay-book. Thus it was prevented that gastric patients went to a hospital of their choice, that X-ray examinations that were repeatedly requested by the patients were not made, etc.

In my capacity as Chief Medical Officer of Army Group B I was given the order by Gen Fldm Model to visit Stomach Battalion 276, belonging to the 347th Inf Div, 74th Corps, on 15 Oct 1944. The Battalion was assigned to the very front line and housed in the underground West Wall shelters in an area that was extensively muddy at that time. Except for the medical officer the entire staff consisted of officers suffering from gastric diseases. According to the Bn Commander he had only half a stomach left, which caused him constant troubles. Having been informed of the combat tasks assigned to this Battalion I was surprised that it still could hold through physically. At that time the Battalion was engaged in position warfare at this particular point. The opponent across the line knew of the physical condition of Stomach Battalion 276. The leaflets exactly listing names and diseases of the officers, which were shown to me,

left no doubt. The Battalion Commander asked me to submit to Gen Fldm Model the request for immediate relief of his unit. In answer to my repeated verbal reports I was informed that the reasons were admittely obvious, but that a replacement for the Stomach Battalion was simply not available. Several weeks later this Battalion was however withdrawn to a rear position. Details in regard to the daily sick-rolls cannot be given because of lack of supporting documents.

Orders were issued by myself covering the control of newly broken out gastric diseases in regular troops throughout Army Group B. The supervision was assigned to my advisory internist, Prof. Dr. Dr. Bader.

Allegedly the conditions in Stomach Battalion 276 corresponded with those in Division 70 on the Walcheren island under General Daser.

signed: Dr. Scherf
Surgeon General

(From 10 Oct 44 - 15 Apr 45
Chief Medical Officer of
Army Group B)