

Veterans Don't Want PROBLEM CHILD TREATMENT

By DON WHARTON

(Reprinted from Common Sense as condensed in The Reader's Digest, by special permission)

THIS is urgent advice to the wives, sweethearts, parents, relatives and friends of the veterans who are coming back from war. The advice is: stop trying to practice amateur

psychiatry on them, don't be misguided by the widely published attempts to tell you "how to handle" these "changed men." Instead, welcome the boys home naturally, as what they are—that is, fundamentally the same boys who went away.

This bit of advice is not the writer's idea, not an editor's idea, not the idea of the War or Navy Department. It is the idea of a bunch of combat veterans back from action overseas.

Vets Disgusted

They brought up the subject, and asked that something be written to prevent other homecoming soldiers from having to undergo the patronizing, over-sympathetic, kid glove treatment they had encountered on their own return. They were disgusted with the impression created among their home folks that most returned soldiers were strange neurotics who didn't want to talk about what they'd been through, who had to be handled with care.

They wanted everyone to know that returned soldiers asked only to be treated like normal human beings without any of the pampering advocated in most "When-He-Comes-Home" articles.

It began in a hotel room in Richmond, Va., where 10 returned soldiers were sitting around "shooting the breeze," mostly about how it seemed to be home. One of them mentioned the campaign in the American press telling people how to act when Joe comes home. That set them going.

"My wife had been reading a lot of that tripe," said one infantryman, wounded in Italy. "It damn near spoiled my leave. Here I was, full of the war, wanting to tell her what I'd seen, and how I got nicked—all the things I couldn't put into letters. She'd just listen, never say a word, never ask a question. It seems she'd swallowed some article telling wives they mustn't talk about the war; mustn't show any interest, my God, in the thing which has completely absorbed their husbands' lives for two years and more!"

"It's stupid," another boy said. "Crack down on it! We heard about it over there from replacements, heard they were treating us queer. Same propaganda in magazine fiction, too. Do they think we can't read?"

One boy with a cast on his leg

"painful readjustment" to civilian life. A program book of the Office of War Information admonishes, "Avoid questions of combat experience"; similar warnings have appeared not only in books and magazines but even in advertisements. Writers of such nonsense should have been at St. Albans Naval Hospital and heard four sailors laughing at this one: "To ask him about the new lands he has visited and the folkways of the people is quite in order."

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A naval officer put it this way: "I was at a dinner party the other evening, and the hostess turned to me and said, 'You were on an aircraft carrier, weren't you? Tell us some of your experiences.' Like everybody else in the service I resented being put on the stage as a trained seal. But my little girl asked me, 'Daddy, what's it like when a bomb goes off on a ship?' Now, that started me talking! You see, she's only eight, and she never read any propaganda on how to treat papa."

Patronizing Tone

One piece of guidance which spread into millions of homes says: "If he chooses to talk about these things, it will help him if you listen well." This patronizing tone would insult a boy home from prep school, let alone a man home from war. Its implication is that mother or dad or wife actually has no real interest in what the veteran has to say but out of some therapeutic concern for his welfare can be persuaded to "listen well." A sailor, back from Antwerp, read this gem and shook his head when he found that its source was a mental hygiene organization.

"So we're all mental cases, huh?" he said.

Use Common Sense

My own friends have come back from overseas after plenty of rough experiences. They're the same men who went away. More mature, of course. But the convivial ones are still convivial, the reticent ones still shy. Common sense tells you that would be true—and common sense plus your natural tact would cause you instinctively to encourage one man to talk and let the other sit quietly and take it easy.

Yet some psychiatrists write didactic generalities. Says one magazine article: "Not only will your Joe come back changed; he is changed already." Certainly combat has had its effect on him, but basically he is the same man. What he needs most is intelligent handling and time to adjust himself to civilian life. Throughout human history many men have gone through horrors, hardships and suffering without emerging as psychopathic changelings. They are matured by the experience, and when their personality is changed, it is often for the better. Hardship sometimes tempers a man.

The words of a Marine officer, back from South Pacific duty, blow through the mists like a clean breeze:

"The whole thing is wrong—trying to set up rules on how to treat men back from war. There are no rules. Every man is different. People draw up plans about just how they're going to act when Johnnie comes through the front door. Then Johnny comes in through

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SPEAKING OF POSTWAR READJUSTMENT



(Reprinted from The Chicago Daily News by special permission)

said his mother went through the most extraordinary performance, never even asking how he was hurt, never mentioning the cast, pretending not to see it—but all the time, he said, "treating me as if I were her pregnant daughter."

"Yeah, I know," said an ordnance sergeant. "Ma kept watching me all the time, trying 'not to do anything that would make me nervous.' Of course that just made me nervous as hell."

"Forget That Nonsense"

A gunner chimed in: "I was visiting my brother, and everything was going fine until his wife piped up, 'Don't ask him any questions.' Why don't you write a piece telling people to forget all that nonsense and be natural!"

All this is in sharp contrast to the recent spate of articles and advertisements purporting to help relatives "help" veterans in their

No man likes to be prodded into talking about his combat experiences unless he is in the mood for it. Some men never want to. But, given a little time and sympathetic listeners, the normal service man wants to talk. Why not? They are the most exciting, the most terrible, the most important, the most interesting things that have ever happened to him in his life, or probably ever will. What else would he talk about?

He has been writing home. He imagines you have read his letters over and over, as carefully as he read yours—that you tried to read between the lines, figure out things he tried to get across to you without violating the rules of security. "Now what happened that made you break off such and such a letter so suddenly?" "Whatever became of Sergeant Valetti you mentioned once?" Such questions show

BRADLEY TO VET OFFICE

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Three years ago the late Ernie Pyle, writing from North Africa, said of the new Veterans Administrator:

"I don't believe I have ever known a person to be so unanimously loved and respected by the men around and under him."

General Bradley endeared himself to his men while he was leading the Second Corps to victory in Tunisia, commanding the troops that invaded Sicily and leading them to the straits of Messina, and finally while commanding the million-strong 12th Army Group in Europe as it slashed from the beaches of Normandy into the heart of Germany.

Vets Object

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There's been a lot of advice printed telling wives to make allowances for this strange man who has come home, and for his strange new habits. Some of this advice is wise, some of it seems downright petty. It would be just as valid to remind wives that, except in the front lines, he's used to very tidy housekeeping, and he's used to having his chow on the dot—and plenty of it. And he is not used to having the mess sergeant regale him with stories about the troubles he has getting this or that, or how tired he is from standing over the stove. Maybe he has as many allowances to make as she.

The Good Old Formula

More serious is the letdown from tension and excitement. Civilian life, after the novelty wears off, may seem pretty dull to the veteran. But there's no recipe for dealing with that, other than the good old formula of common sense. He has to face it, and nobody helps any by treating him as a "case." However, as one of the boys said, "If I could adjust myself to the sudden hell of jungle fighting, why can't I easily adjust back to the simple and familiar ways of civilized life?"

Maj. Gen. Norman T. Kirk, Surgeon General of the Army, says: "The average soldier returning to civilian life is basically the same man he was when he went away. True, the rigid training, the disciplined life, the experiences far from home have matured him. But to feel that each returned soldier is a 'problem child' is to underestimate the character of American manhood. The large majority of these

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Signal Corps Photo

GEN. OMAR N. BRADLEY

General Hines' resignation ended twenty-three years of service to American veterans. When he took

over V. A. in 1922 it was in public disfavor. He did a remarkable job in the intervening years, according to veterans' organizations, in directing the country-wide system of hospitals and regional offices.

The change in administrators was made, President Truman said, to modernize V. A. to confront problems developing from World War II. As it now stands, the President said, V. A. is set up for the last war.

Four-Star General

The new Veterans Administrator will close his affairs as Commander of the 12th Army Group before taking office, after which he will continue as a four-star general in the Army. General Hines will continue to direct V. A. affairs until General Bradley takes over, and then, President Truman said, will be given another post of great importance.

Although General Hines also has been Administrator of Retraining and Reemployment under the Office

For Your Files

NEW ADDRESS

The Chicago office of the Illinois Veterans Commission has been moved to 128 N. Wells St., Chicago 6. The new telephone number of the Chicago office is CENTral 2931. Please change your records accordingly to save your time and the time of those in the Chicago office who are trying to serve you, and to avoid placing a heavier burden on an already overburdened post office.

The Springfield office of the Commission remains at 223 E. Monroe St. The telephone number has been changed to 5781.

of War Mobilization and Reconstruction, General Bradley will not take over this duty. Another appointment will be made to handle that division of veterans rehabilitation, the President said.

Vets Object to Problem Child Treatment by Civilians

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Maj. Gen. Norman T. Kirk, Surgeon General of the Army, says: "The average soldier returning to civilian life is basically the same man he was when he went away. True, the rigid training, the disciplined life, the experiences far from home have matured him. But to feel that each returned soldier is a 'problem child' is to underestimate the character of American manhood. The large majority of these

men can take their experiences in stride and can return to their homes, their families, and their jobs finer citizens, ready and able to shoulder their share of responsibility in the civilian world."

Maybe it's we civilians who have been getting neurotic about this; losing our perspective. Certainly we ought to remember that after the last war the great majority of veterans

were simply their own normal selves when they came back, and often went on in matter-of-fact civilian life to achieve great success and distinction—which would hardly have been possible if they'd all come back with strangely shattered personalities.

Maj. Gen. David N. W. Grant, head of the Army Air Forces medical services, deals with men who are, by and large, the most highly strung bunch of youngsters ever assembled. If any veterans needed to be regarded as "special" it would be they. But General Grant says flatly, "Much of the stuff that's being printed is nonsense." He adds:

Tells Our Challenge

"This is the challenge we face each time a war veteran returns home—to see that he has full opportunity to spring back to his original personality curve. Given a little time and a little help most of them will. Removal of abnormal stress and tension is cure enough in most cases. But the change from an environment of tension to one of relaxation is a radical one and, in instances in which the fatigue of the personality has been great, special help must be given in making the adjustment."

And for a calm bit of wisdom, hear Maj. Gen. William R. Arnold, Chief of Chaplains, U. S. Army: "Let's not underestimate the courage and common sense of returned service men. Be natural, friendly, and normally glad to see them. Welcome them home. Encourage them to talk about their experiences. Genuine respect and affection will do more than all studied efforts to heal the hurts of the human spirit."

WELCOME HOME!

By Gregory D'Alessio



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"Hmmm—I can make out four of my ties, two sport shirts, and a pair of pajamas . . ."