BOOK REVIEWS

AVIATION NEUROPSYCHIATRY

R. N. Ironside and J. R. C. Batchelor
(Edinburgh, and S. Livingstone, Ltd., 1945. Pp. 167. 8s. 6d.)

As the authors say in the Preface, this book aims at being a "practical clinical guide to an important subject scantily dealt with in the literature of aviation medicine." In point of fact it is a very practical account of the type of neuropsychiatry which came to be practised in the Royal Air Force during the war that has recently terminated. For this reason the book might have been better named Neuropsychiatry in the Royal Air Force.

The pure psychiatrists will be disappointed that psychiatric treatment has been virtually omitted except for a few paragraphs in Chapter 8, and in one or two other sentences scattered through the book. The reason for this omission is, of course, that the aim of those doctors who were actively engaged in neuropsychiatry among Royal Air Force personnel little by little became a matter of excluding all those with a bad prognosis and allowing the men with a more coherent personality to recover spontaneously. The hallmark of the book is fine common sense, brevity, and clarity. The style is in places racy, and interest never flags. It is pleasant to read in the case-history of a psychopathic personality the verbatim account that "he had destroyed two aircraft and damaged four others, none of these belonging to the enemy."

The authors are probably at their best in the account they give of hysteria in the Royal Air Force. This was one of the least common psychological conditions among aircrew although the incidence among non-flying personnel was approximately that recorded by the other Services. When hysteria did occur among flying men it was found, as Ironside and Batchelor state, that the symptoms were particularly disabling in relation to the duties of the individual concerned, and that the prognosis was uniformly poor. In the event of another similar conflict, a great deal of trouble both to the General Duties Branch and to the Medical Branch of the Service would be avoided if all aircrew suffering from hysteria were invalided forthwith.

There is a good chapter on the prognosis for flying after injuries and diseases of the nervous system, and as the late Director-General of the Medical Services of the Royal Air Force says in his Foreword, medical officers of the Royal Air Force will find the book of considerable interest and value. It has as well a wider field and can be confidently recommended to all those who in the Services or as civilians have had the care of cases of psychological disorder in the last few years.

MEN UNDER STRESS IN AND AFTER COMBAT

Roy R. Grinker and John P. Spiegel

This book is the record of the work of two well-known American psychiatrists with U.S. Army Air Force units during the war. From a study of the tragic experiences of the combat groups in bomber formations the authors have sought to delineate the social and individual psychology of the soldier. The various neurotic reactions to stress are illustrated with a wealth of case material; consideration of the men themselves, their background and their selection get less attention. The psychological and social organization of bomber units of the U.S. air force was highly specialized. The men lived in an artificial "homosexual society," which the writers are at some pains to describe. In Grinker and Spiegel's view, the process of training for such a life is a process of giving up the hardly won independences of adult development. The soldier sacrifices his own individual needs, his individual sources of aggressive outlet and gratification, to the needs and discipline of the group. "What needs he now has can only be satisfied by the group. From this point of view he reverses to a less mature, more dependent level. The soldier therefore comes to love his group and becomes dependent upon it for all his needs. Only in so far as self-discipline, self-sacrifice, and co-operation develop has the combat personality become more mature; from every other point of view the soldier is in a more dependent and immature role than he was in civilian life. The basis for good morale, therefore, is good leadership, since good morale can only be maintained if the dependent "combat personality" can be given the kind of security feeling which the child demands. The anxiety evoked by the stresses of combat is dealt with satisfactorily by the soldier by reason of the strength of his affection for and interest in his group. Breakdown of morale, the development of strong and intolerable anxiety, develops when leadership is bad, when interest and affection turn away from the group and the flier begins to think more and more of his home. Then the group, his officers, and those in authority appear to menace him and to stand in his way of obtaining the gratification of his need for love and security. Within such a formulation the final stress of a severely traumatizing experience is applied only as a trigger to the development of neurosis. The handling of the psychodynamics of neurosis is strictly psycho-analytical. The regressed ego, depleted from the lack of gratification of its needs and exhausted by fatigue, is overwhelmed by anxiety and guilt. Dependent and defenceless, the ego re-experiences past conflicts over hostile-aggressive activities and these, no longer directed towards the enemy, turn either upon itself (depression) or upon the group (paranoid aggressive actions). In others the overwhelmed ego develops a passive dependent state (hysterical regression) or resorts to primitive expression of its conflicts in "binding the anxiety" in somatic symptoms.

The writers deal with their case material at length and fully illustrate the different reactions which they found. The familiar techniques of abrasion with intravenous barbiturates and the new hybrid "narcosynthesis" receive due attention. In a work which is so psycho-pathological in its conception, it is surprising to find a speculative excursion into neurophysiology in the chapter on psychodynamics.

In the final chapters Grinker and Spiegel deal with the neurotic reaction of returned soldiers and their theme remains the same. Having adjusted to the group super-ego the flier cannot give up the dependence upon it which the return to civilian life demands. It is repressed and cannot be independent. The responsibilities of civilian life offer inadequate sources of gratification; or the ego is still depleted and cannot give love but only receive it. His experiences have destroyed whatever maturity or neurotic compromises his personality has made. "The soldier is forced to resume earlier, less adaptive, apparently more gratifying, regressive compromise solutions, but these turn out to be uneconomical, painful, and subject to frustration."

It cannot be believed, as the authors hope, that a study of this book will fit young psychiatrists for the more general field of their work. Nor can we follow the writers in the application of their data to the wider problems of civilization and its contents", yet these studies of men under prolonged and terrible stress, the significant factors of their group morale, and the manner of their breakdown and treatment, are a significant contribution to the psychology of interpersonal relationships. The writing is clear and sympathetic and contains accounts of much suffering and much courage. Obviously, this book is aimed at a wider public than a medical one.