

PSYCHIATRIC SITUATION PARALLELLING TACTICAL
SITUATION IN THE 4TH ARMORED DIVISION

On 25 November 1943, the psychiatrist reported to the 4th Armored Division which was then stationed at Camp Bowie, Texas. At that time the division was alerted for movement overseas. There was considerable activity in preparing for this move. The troops were ready. They had largely been in the Army for a period of 18 months or more and were psychologically prepared. Since the division had furnished cadres on many occasions before, the process of natural selection had already eliminated many of the psychologically unfit men from the ranks. Further selection of personnel had been made possible and many men had been transferred when the division was re-organized in September of 1943. Previously, the training program had been arduous at Pine Camp, New York, and on maneuvers in Tennessee and in the California Desert. This too had eliminated personnel unable to go to combat.

Upon arrival of the psychiatrist the situation was very favorable to the production of neurotic reactions in that the men were leaving their native land and loved ones for a dangerous voyage across the Atlantic to enter a combat zone of which they had little knowledge. A considerable number of anxiety reactions appeared and psychosomatic complaints increased. However, only one hysterical reaction occurred and this promptly responded to suggestion. The men were convinced of ultimate victory for the Allies as the Russians had already beaten the Germans at Stalingrad and the Sicilian Campaign had successfully closed. Strangely, there never was any doubt in the enlisted man's mind that the division was going to the ETO, although the destination was top secret information. The men

thought themselves fortunate to be going to the ETO rather than to the Pacific Theater. Many men believed they would never participate in combat, feeling the Germans would surrender before an Allied Invasion occurred. Some officers shared this belief. The leadership of the division was very capably vested in Major General John S. Wood. The men had great confidence in him and knew him to be a very fair man.

During the period of less than one month before the division embarked for the port of embarkation about one hundred men were sent for psychiatric consultation. Fully 60% of these cases were anxiety reactions of varying severity. The milder types of anxiety reactions were generally relieved by a frank interview in which all work was kept at a conscious level. Since many of these men were well trained in the use of weapons, communications and ordnance they were brought along with the division in spite of their difficulties because it was impossible to replace them with satisfactory reinforcements. It was planned at that time to continue seeing these men at intervals after arriving at the foreign destination. Forty six (46) men were hospitalized from the division for neuropsychiatric reasons during this period. Many of them were constitutional psychopathic state and mental defective cases. No man was hospitalized if there was any possibility of utilizing him within the division.

Movement to the port of embarkation was by train journey of about three days and after arrival the division remained in port for about nine days. While waiting for shipment the Christmas Holiday occurred and this added to the sadness of departure. Generally, the morale remained excellent in spite of this fact. The men whose families were near were permitted a twenty-four hour pass to visit their homes.

The others managed to get to a neighboring town sometime during the stay there. There were a few cases of AWOL at this time, but practically all returned in time for shipment overseas. During this stay four (4) men were evacuated for psychiatric reasons - one overt homosexual and three chronic alcoholics.

In the Port of Embarkation one hundred and fifty (150) reinforcements were assigned to the division. These men were selected by the Division G-1 and Psychiatrist out of approximately three hundred (300) who were available. Although an interview of about one (1) minute per man was all that was possible, many men were left behind because of inaptitude from either psychological or other reasons.

The voyage overseas was without incident of importance, except one (1) man was washed overboard and lost. The seas were generally calm throughout the journey and the men arrived in England in a good state of health.

On landing in England, the troops first experienced total blackout. The training program was rigorous and in several instances the division maneuvered as a unit. All training was toward developing an aggressive attitude and to familiarize the soldier with his part in the approaching warfare. The psychiatrist spent considerable time with the line officers in discussions regarding the importance of leadership and aggressive attitude. Information regarding combat exhaustion as to etiology, recognition, prevention, was given to all line officers.

In England the troops had their first experience of living in an environment outside the U. S. A. There were a few instances of enemy action at the time which made clear to the men they were in a combat theater. The men soon adapted themselves to living in the British Isles.

Shortly after arrival one frequently heard unfavorable comparison of Britain to America, but as time wore on these remarks became noticeably less. In all truth, the British people made every effort to make the division's stay pleasant. However, the being away from home, the occasional enemy action, and the awareness that the expected action was nearer added some to the anxiety and tension of the total situation.

During the stay in England one hundred and seventy-six (176) men were evacuated for neuropsychiatric reasons. Four (4) of these cases were psychotics, one (1) a catatonic schizophrenia, and three (3) were paranoid schizophrenias; about forty (40) men were evacuated for anxiety situations and the remainder were constitutional psychopathic state patients, with the majority classified as inadequate personality.

As the preparation for overseas movement developed there was a sharp increase in the hysterical reactions. None had been noted until D-Day, but between D-Day and 12 July there were eight (8) cases in the division. These were practically all monoplegias and invariably responded in some degree to Sodium Pentothal Abreaction therapy. Four (4) of these cases recovered completely while the other four (4) were evacuated to hospitals, but one (1) of these latter four rejoined the division in France about three(3) months later. This soldier performed his duty satisfactorily for one (1) month after which he was evacuated for an arthritis.

In England all replacements coming into the division were interviewed by the psychiatrist. About ten (10) of these replacements were evacuated because of psychological difficulties. This was deemed wise for the reason that time was not available to utilize a trial period for these men. It was necessary to integrate into the division all men who were to go to battle with it.

Early in July, about the 7th of the month, the division sailed for France. In all respects the unit was ready for combat, especially as to psychological attitude, understanding their weapons, and physical fitness.

On arriving in France the division went into an assembly area in the vicinity of Barneville Sur Mere, France. There were a few accidental casualties from the troops being "trigger happy." The men were over-reacting to the newness of the situation and at night the safest location was in one's pup tent. The program of instruction that had been given in the "Stars and Stripes" had made the men very cautious regarding mines and snipers. There probably was an overemphasis placed on "digging in" and foxholes were to be deep and shelved and covered. Perhaps too much stress was placed on protective measures and this probably lowered the aggressive attitude so necessary. For the first time some fear reaction became evident.

On 17 July 1944, the division was committed to combat, relieving and taking over an Infantry Division's sector. The Armored Infantrymen were dismounted from their vehicles, some of the cavalry reconnaissance units were dismounted and used as foot troops and some of the Engineers fought as Infantry. The Artillery units functioned as such and the Tank Battalions were held in reserve. At this time the fighting was in the Normandy hedgerows and the enemy was very capable. In this action the troops were handicapped by the loss of firepower their vehicles had given them, and psychologically by the absence of tanks with which they were trained to fight, and also by fighting as foot infantry when their training had been to fight as Armored Infantry.

In taking over the sector the men were brought to the reality of the

situation by finding some American dead. There was some mortar and artillery fire as the units moved into their positions. As was customary, the Germans sent a patrol of about one hundred (100) men through the forward areas of the division that night and added more to the already tense situation. Early the next morning the first combat exhaustion cases came in. They were convinced the battalion had been wiped out in a German attack. Many men were amazed to find some of their friends occupying the same tent with them when they were certain the unit had been wiped out. The men complained that they could not fight German SS's with M-1 rifles. Stories of the enemy's accuracy with mortars indicated the Germans were "Supermen." Strangely though, with all the stories of destruction, the battalion had lost only thirty (30) men when the morning report was complete. The sending of patrols through the areas of a new unit seemed to be a standard procedure of the Germans. Each time a new battalion took over a sector this occurred, with the same results as listed above. In three (3) instances this procedure resulted in an average of eighteen (18) combat exhaustions coming in for treatment. Chiefly the reactions were of the anxiety type, but there were several Parkinson-like reactions, as well as a few hysterical reactions, including one (1) astasia-abasia and two hysterical deafnesses. There were three (3) cases of what appeared to be catatonic schizophrenia, if the degree of withdrawal is a criterion.

These cases coming into the station for treatment at this time were not the best men of the division. Many of them gave histories of neurotic behavior in civil life. Many were in lower levels (group IV - V) of the AGCT rating. Of one hundred and twenty-six (126) cases coming for treatment during this time, seventy-four (74) were returned to duty.

At the end of this period the Breakthrough at Periers had occurred. The troops were again mounted and functioning as an Armored Division is trained to function. There was remarkable success in exploiting the breakthrough. For these reasons the incidence of combat exhaustion dropped markedly. For the next forty-five (45) days this success maintained - vast distances were covered - Brittany was cut off by a breakthrough at Avranches to Nantes - Lorient was contained - the division turned eastward - took Orleans, Montargis, Sens, Troyes, Chalon, Toul, Commercy, and isolated Nancy after crossing the Moselle. In all this action of over fifty-five (55) days there were only one hundred and fifty-six (156) cases of combat exhaustion and seventy (70) of these returned to duty. During this time the weather was excellent, the division was very successful and world politicians were forecasting the early collapse of Germany. The men coming in for treatment at this time, as a group, were better than the first cases that were treated. Some replacements were now coming for treatment also.

The morale in the division was excellent. The troops quite openly were proud of their record. They had gained much in battle wisdom and had learned to respect German weapons.

Diet had been largely K and C rations, but the troops had supplemented this diet with fresh vegetables and eggs. There was some weight loss present in nearly every man. Psychologically the fatigue evidence was noted in the increase of startle reactions and the tension present in almost everyone. Tempers were quicker to flare up and there was a general increase in alcoholic consumption. (There was plenty of liquor available.)

At this time the gasoline shortage stopped aggressive action. The Germans were given an opportunity to reorganize and build defenses. As the

weather became cooler there was a great amount of rain. All these weather changes contributed to the soldier's discomfort. Once again it was necessary to dig in and hold. Troops were again dismounted to hold positions. In addition, the Germans began counterattacking in strength.

Beginning September 16th the incidence of exhaustion casualties began to increase and by September 27th had reached an alarming figure. On that date seventy-one (71) men were admitted for treatment. At this time some of the best men in the division became exhaustion casualties. There was a high percentage of non-commissioned officers of the first three grades. The following letter was sent reporting the situation:

HEADQUARTERS FOURTH ARMORED DIVISION
OFFICE OF THE SURGEON
APO # 254, U. S. ARMY

1900, 27 Sept 44

SUBJECT: Report from Auxiliary Treatment Center.

TO : The Surgeon, 4th Armored Division.

1. Because the amount of combat exhaustion cases has reached alarming proportions, this report is submitted, which includes 16 Sept to 27 Sept at 1900.

Admissions According to Units During this Period:

25 Cav.....	20
53 Inf.....	13
8 Tank.....	10
22 FA.....	2
10 Inf.....	88 (44 admitted 27 Sept 44)
24 Engrs.....	6
35 Tank.....	14
66 FA.....	2
51 Inf.....	27 (11 admitted 27 Sept 44)
126 Ord.....	1
37 Tank.....	25
94 FA.....	6
Trns Hqs.....	1
NP's.....	1
CG "B".....	1
Div Arty.....	2
704 TD.....	17

On 27 Sept a total of seventy-one (71) exhaustion cases were admitted.

Some causes of this increase are:

(1) Men have been in combat for ten (10) weeks, which is evidently the breaking point for many men.

(2) The great amount of rain during this period has increased the number of cases.

(3) Troops have had little opportunity for rest and few have had hot meals.

(4) Morale is definitely lower - troops coming to this station feel that because this is a crack division, it is going to be used until everyone cracks up.

If the troops are kept in combat, provisions must be made to handle greater numbers of these cases since, in the past, it has been found that the exhaustion cases increase in ratio to the amount of time committed to combat.

It must be considered also that these cases, developing late in combat time, are more difficult to effect recovery in, and also a longer period of time is needed for recovery of these cases.

These cases coming into the treatment station now are some of the best men in the division. Many are non-commissioned officers and the number of technical and staff sergeants is high.

Also to be considered is the fact that individual efficiency of the men goes down as they become more fatigued.

Recommend: Ten (10) days rest for all the units of the division as soon as possible. The rest should be as complete as possible during which time the men can get their clothing and equipment in shape again. It would be advisable, if possible, that the men be given passes to some town also, when the situation permits."

Tactically the situation demanded that the division hold. Relief was coming and the men knew they were to be relieved. The waiting was difficult and complaints were numerous as to the slowness of the relief coming up, however, the knowledge that relief was on its way did help alleviate the situation and made it possible for some men to hold on. Between September 15th and September 30th there were three hundred and fifty-five (355) incidences of exhaustion. This was more than had occurred in the previous two (2) months. A great number of these men, however, were returned to duty.

The division, except for the Artillery, was finally relieved about the 5th October. The men were given passes to Nancy whenever possible, shower units were brought up, the kitchens were brought up and B rations made available. Reinforcements were trained and, in general, the time was spent in preparation for next commitment. During this time of preparation the troops were within sound of artillery and most of them lived in pup tents. One battalion commander had his men sleep in foxholes. The weather was very unpleasant and some units were compelled to move because of high water. In spite of the unpleasantness of the environment, morale rose quickly in the division and the troops were well rested. They were ready for the next assignment. During this time the units cleared themselves of inefficient men. These were either evacuated or transferred to service units within the division. In the month of October, one hundred and ninety-four (194) men were treated, sixty-one (61) of these were returned to duty.

About 8th November, the division again went to combat in the Saar Valley. In this campaign, the Germans were well prepared and fought tenaciously for every mile of territory. The weather was severe for the cold had increased and there was a great amount of rain. There was difficulty in maneuvering armor as the vehicles were road bound. Furthermore, road nets were not suitable for easy operation of armored units. Many men were unable to change to dry clothing after getting wet. Considerable difficulty was present in getting hot food to the men. The weather effect on physical stamina was pronounced as compared to the effect of the milder weather of the summer. Probably the most pronounced factor in the causation of combat exhaustion at this time was the inclement weather. During this campaign, which lasted about

one (1) month, the gains were minor as compared to experiences of the summer. Vehicular losses and personnel casualties were high. The Germans were using artillery and mortars in great amounts. As far as weather and enemy action were concerned this campaign was probably the most severe of the war in the ETO. In addition, the rosy outlook for an early peace had been shattered. This did not contribute to the mental welfare of the troops. They were fighting a determined enemy in the most severe climatic conditions.

At this time the problem of Trench Foot and Frostbite suddenly descended in alarming amounts. There is, in this writer's opinion, a parallel in the Diathesis of combat exhaustion and Trench Foot. The incidence of combat exhaustion dropped as the incidence of Trench Foot rose. The men coming in at this time were some of the better men in the division. Many were older men who were unable to continue in this situation. Age above thirty-five (35) in an enlisted man certainly adds to his chances of becoming a combat exhaustion case.

During the month of November and to 10th December seven hundred and twenty (720) men were treated for exhaustion and of these two hundred and eighty-nine (289) were returned to duty. At this time the effect of cumulative battle experience was evident. The repeated traumatizing experiences of battle were producing a less dramatic but none the less disabling form of combat exhaustion. These men were apathetic and were incapable of any further combat. They were so conditioned that any enemy activity would cause them to seek shelter and it was impossible for them to leave shelter. Many of these men were NCO's who had previously been excellent leaders. After treatment they would apathetically return to duty to be sent back immediately by a platoon leader who could no longer

use them. It was soon learned that it was not profitable to try to treat these men at the division level. The time needed for treatment and rehabilitation of these cases was far more than was possible at the divisional level.

Another factor was noticed in tank crews. A man could sustain having his tank knocked out by enemy action twice, but after the third time the tanker is usually a combat exhaustion case. There are exceptions to this, however, and some men were still going at the cessation of hostilities after being in more than six tanks knocked out by enemy action.

At this time, the facilities for housing exhaustion patients were the poorest at any time during the campaign. A former French Officers' barracks was utilized and it was necessary to keep men on three floor levels. In addition to the hazard of steep stairways inside the building, there was a high porch at the entrance which had no bannister and the steps leading down were steep and slippery. In this set up, it was necessary that each man be permitted to remain in a high state of awareness. The dosage of Sodium Amytal was reduced from twenty-one (21) to six (6) grains daily. In spite of the change in therapy, approximately the same percentage of men were returned to duty as had been possible with deeper narcosis therapy.

On about 10th December the division was again relieved. For about one (1) week the men were re-equipped and new men were trained and plans were in progress to develop further recreation facilities. Efforts were made to get the troops inside buildings. Generally morale was good. Now the reality of the grim task ahead was evident.

About 20th December the division moved over one hundred (100) miles to aid in stopping the German Breakthrough in the Ardennes. This was the

first time that the division had been called on to fight against enemy activity of such magnitude. There was no evidence of apprehension in the troops. They were confident as to the outcome, but realized the effort that would be required. It is quite possible that the previous month of hard fighting had been an excellent factor in the psychological preparation for this task. Fortunately the ground had frozen and it was again possible to maneuver armor off the roads. On arriving at the assembly area there was some snow on the ground. The temperature was below freezing, but the men were dry. They did not have the discomfort of being wet tee. Generally the drain on physical fitness proved to be far less in this cold dry weather than had been noted previously. The mission was to break through to the surrounded troops at Bastogne. This mission was one which had a definite objective and there was decidedly more incentive than would have been the case had the objective been just some more high ground. The fighting was severe, but the incidence of combat exhaustion was far less than had been noted before. From 10th December to 2nd January the total incidence of exhaustion was two hundred and forty-six (246) cases of which ninety-five (95) were returned to duty. Many of these cases were simple physical exhaustion cases.

The evidence of cumulative battle exhaustion was more pronounced. Generally the soldier was returned by his platoon leader for inefficiency. The man would usually be apathetic, mildly uninterested in his surroundings and easy to deal with. He spent all possible time resting and was not too much interested in recounting battle experiences. As a rule, considerable weight loss was evident and there was some difficulty in sleeping. At the end of two (2) to four (4) days the man would return

to duty, but would be still inefficient after return. Generally the most pronounced symptom was mood flattening.

After the breakthrough to the surrounded troops had been accomplished the division was again concentrated in a rest area. The Artillery Battalions were kept on the line firing support of other troops and the Infantry Battalions were alternately used in holding one small sector. Generally, the troops were all inside buildings. There was considerable recreation in form of passes to Luxembourg City and Paris, along with movies. Excellent rations were obtained and for the next month the troops were trained and re-equipped. Some personnel were evacuated because of inefficiency and cumulative fatigue. This rest period lasted until 23rd February when the division was again committed to combat at the Luxembourg-Germany border. On the first day of combat there was rather severe action as the troops broke through the prepared defenses. On the first day of action seventy-five (75) cases of exhaustion occurred. Most of these cases were among recent replacements. Strangely, after the first day of action exhaustion cases suddenly dropped to a negligible number. Once again the division was signally successful. Enemy resistance was weak and after passing through the prepared positions enemy artillery was almost negligible. With minor losses in equipment and men the division rolled through to the Rhine River.

Once again there was a few days rest, but on this occasion the morale was at peak. The last great barrier had been forced by another armored division at Remagen. The division could maneuver as it had the previous summer. A very successful campaign to the Rhine had been easily accomplished. There were signs of disintegration of the German fighting forces everywhere.

The next assignment was the campaign in the Saar region. Here, in spite of hard fighting, the incidence of exhaustion was low. The division was very successful in cutting parallel to the Rhine and going through to Worms. Following the completion of the task in the Saar region the division crossed the Rhine at Oppenheim and by 20th April had reached the vicinity of Chemnitz. Enroute they had captured two bridges over the Main River, joined with the First Army each of Geissen and then spear-headed the attack by way of Lauterbach, Herzfeld, Eisenach, Gotha, Weimar, Jena, Gera, to Chemnitz. During this whole time combat exhaustion incidence was lowest of all time. There was almost a complete lack of German artillery. This factor alone is worthy of consideration in causation. During the fighting from the Luxembourg border to Chemnitz, a period of about two (2) months, there were three hundred and thirty-two (332) cases of exhaustion. Of these, one hundred and sixty-five (165) were returned to duty and one hundred and sixty-seven (167) were evacuated. During this time enemy air activity was rather impressive at times. There were numerous instances of strafing and bombing. Strangely, there was considerable apprehension and emotional reaction to this activity, but evidently the success at the time kept the incidence of exhaustion cases down to a low figure. Another factor in regard to the lack of exhaustion cases during this time of enemy air activity was the aggressive attitude of the troops which resulted in thirty-seven (37) German planes being shot down in one day. At Chemnitz the division was halted and rested for a few days and was then sent to an assembly area at Bayreuth. From there a few days later the division was committed again in a march into Czechoslovakia. In a march of about forty (40) miles into enemy territory the only casualties were vehicular in character and only one German was killed.

The Germans surrendered 9th May 1945.

Incidence of Combat Exhaustion Cases as to source of men:

<u>SOURCE</u>		<u>TOTAL EXHAUSTION CASES</u>	
Enlisted men coming with division to Port of Embarkation	10,700	1,018	9.6%
From another Armored Division	350	46	13.1%
From Port of Embarkation	160	10	6.2%
Reinforcements in Europe	8,300	749	9.0%

This table reveals these facts: (1) Selection of personnel as done at the Port of Embarkation will reduce the incidence of combat exhaustion. If the G-1 and Psychiatrist could have the opportunity of selecting men for their divisions this would no doubt result in general reduction of exhaustion incidences. (2) The personnel received from "another division" were largely cast offs. Many of the men evacuated from the division in England were from this group. (3) These figures on original integral divisional enlisted men and on reinforcements reveal little because of the attrition from other reasons. One can logically assume that there were more battle days endured by the original divisional personnel than by the reinforcements, however, the percentage is approximately the same.

Further study of exhaustion incidence according to units:

<u>UNIT</u>	<u>TOTAL CASES</u>	<u>TO DUTY</u>	<u>TO HOSPITALS</u>
10th Infantry	472	210	262
51st Infantry	443	204 (1 AWOL)	238
53rd Infantry	584	270	314
25th Cav Ren	101	50	51
24th Engr	60	24	36
8th Tank	80	35	45
35th Tank	173	87	86

1,913
307
+ 2,220 16 -

⊕ - Difference represents men being admitted for C.E. more than once.

8 - 80
35 - 173
37 - 91
34 - 4 (Total tank (mi))

<u>UNIT</u>	<u>TOTAL CASES</u>	<u>TO DUTY</u>	<u>TO HOSPITALS</u>
37th Tank	91	42	49
22nd FA	17	7	10
66th FA	20	6	14
94th FA	32	7	25
Div Arty	3	0	3
MP	2	2	0
CC "A"	3	2	1
CC "B"	5	1	4
126th Ord	19	8	11
704th TD	80	32	48
489th AAA	5	1	4
46th Med	21	12	9
Trains	2	0	2
144th Sig	2	0	2
SS, 4th Arm Div	1	0	1
Div Adm Center	3	0	3
Div Hq Co	1	0	1
	<u>307</u>		

This table reveals the bulk of exhaustion incidence in the infantry battalions of this division. The fact that one infantry battalion has a higher incidence is largely due to the action during the Saar campaign in which one company had the harrowing experience of being pinned down after swimming the Saar River and being held there for a long time.

The Tank Battalion with the highest figure has its explanation in the fact that the battalion surgeon deemed it wise to send in some men for physical exhaustion. Also, this battalion had more change in command and officer personnel than the other two did.

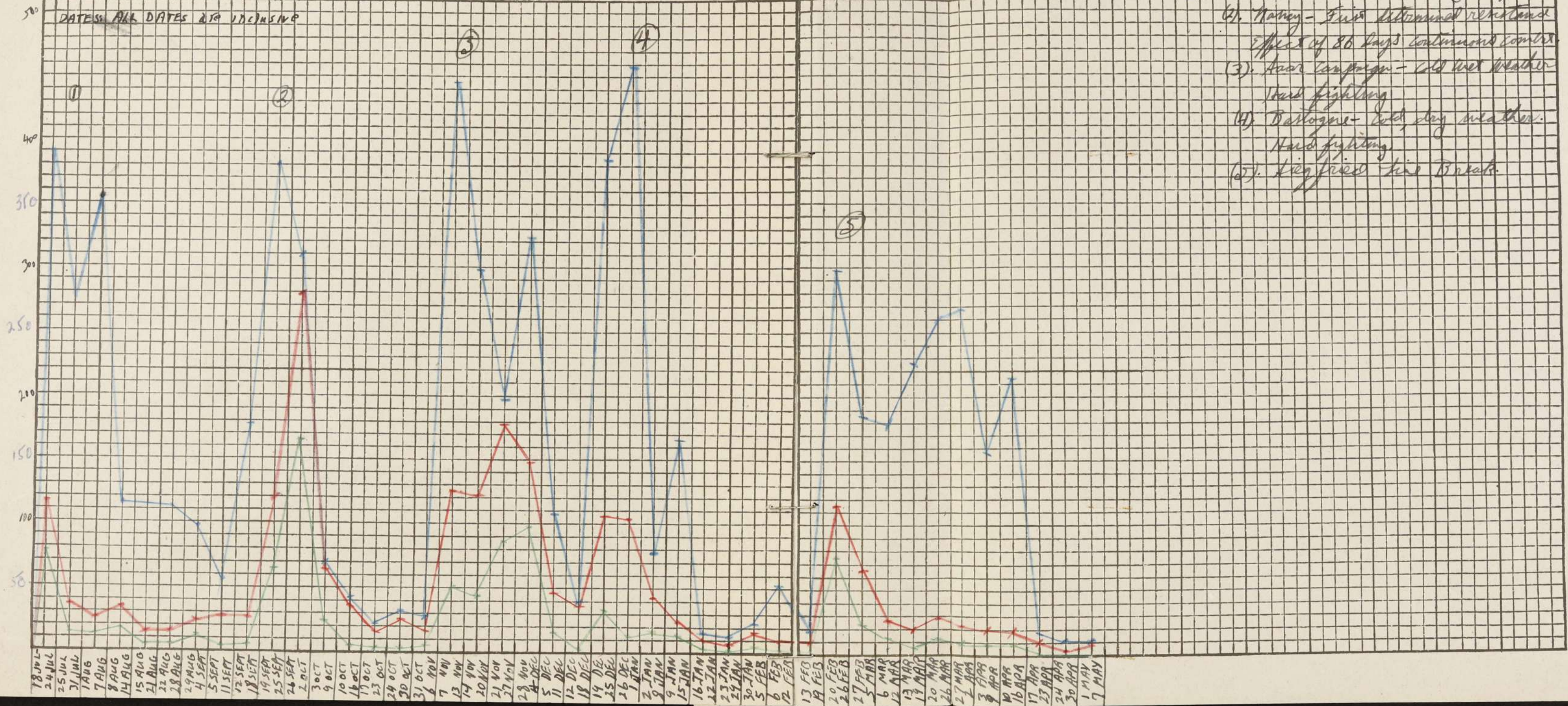
The cases from Trains, SS 4th Arm Div and Administrative Center, were repeaters who had been tried in these assignments as an effort to salvage them.

not
true
combat
exhaustion

1,823 total cases
1,000 returned to duty
823 lost from Division
because of P.E.

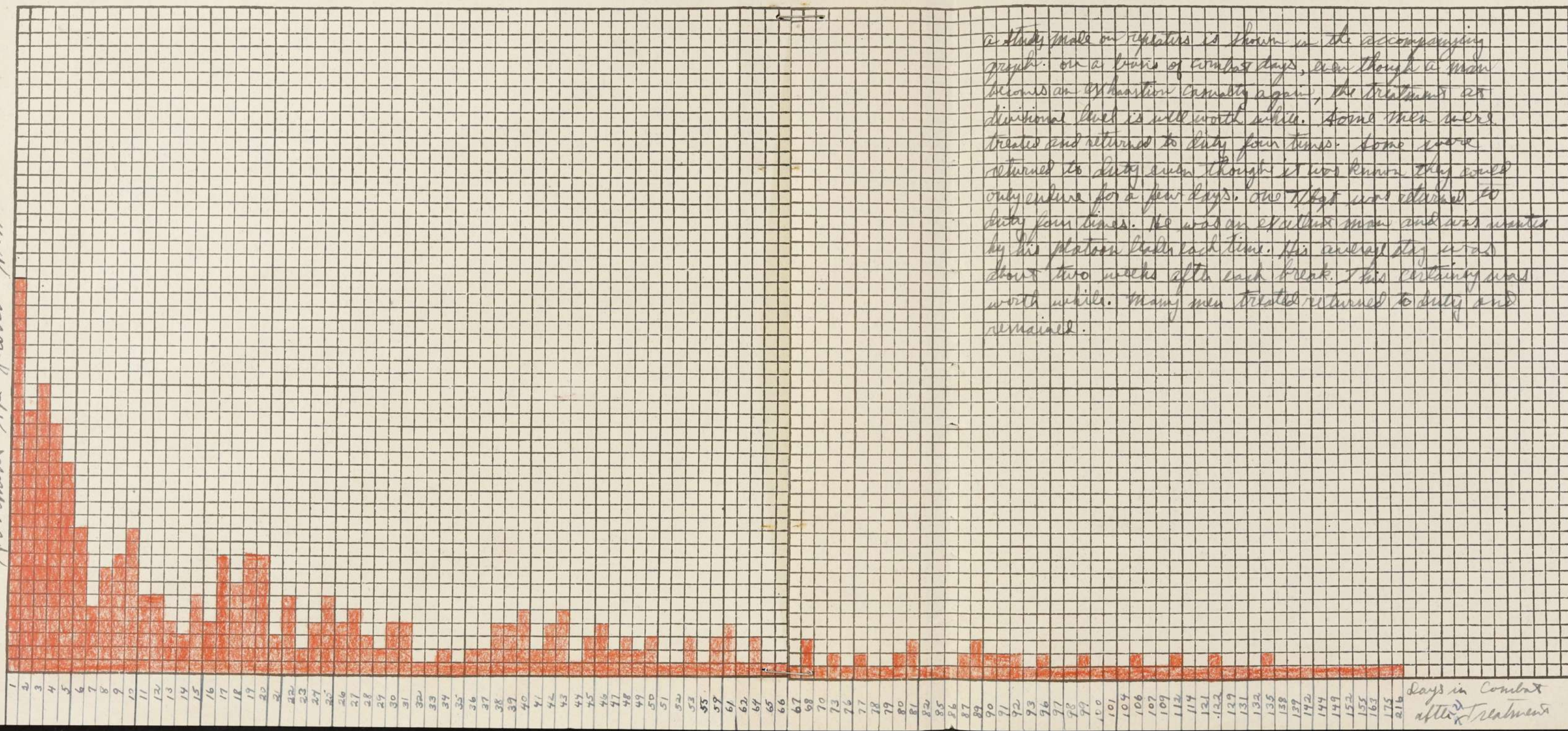
EARL W. MERICLE
Major, Med Corps
Division Psychiatrist

BATTLE CASUALTIES - ALL TYPES
 COMBAT EXHAUSTIONS - ADMITTED
 COMBAT EXHAUSTIONS RETURNED TO DUTY



- (1). Initial Combat - Normandy / Kdys River.
- (2). Nancy - First determined resistance
Effect of 86 days continuous combat.
- (3). Aar Campaign - cold wet weather
Hard fighting
- (4). Bastogne - cold, dry weather.
Hard fighting
- (5). Siegfried Line Break.

Number of Men Returning for
Treatments The Second Time



a study made on repeaters is shown in the accompanying graph. on a basis of combat days, even though a man becomes an exhaustion casualty again, the treatment at divisional level is well worth while. Some men were treated and returned to duty four times. Some were returned to duty even though it was known they could only endure for a few days. One ~~that~~ was returned to duty four times. He was an excellent man and was wanted by his platoon leader each time. His average stay was about two weeks after each break. This certainly was worth while. Many men treated returned to duty and remained.