

# M I S C E L L A N E O U S

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## ON THE SPECIAL MEANING OF "INTERNATIONAL WORK IN COMMON" AMONG MILITARY PHYSICIANS

*A most interesting article by Dr. H. Meuli, member of the ICRC and former Director of the Swiss Army Medical Service, appeared under this title<sup>1</sup>, showing that medicine, link between peoples, constitutes an element of peace ; especially in these times when mutual aid has become a rule amongst the different nations. Medicine, and especially military medicine in time of conflict, is one of the most active factors which can soften the horrors of war and prepare peace. The army medical officer has to study the problems of assistance, brought without discrimination to all victims of conflicts. It is the very spirit of the Red Cross which he must defend and practise. We have therefore thought it worthwhile to reproduce this article relating to problems of actual importance.*

There is none who has a better knowledge of war, measures its horrors and hates it more, than the military medical officer. There is no one better placed than he, acting with full knowledge, to take up a position for *Peace* and against *War*. But the harsh realities of History, the uncertainties of the future do not allow mankind, nor doctors above all, to think of the cataclysm brought about by the eventuality of war, without attempting to find and to make opposition to it with measures of prevention or protection.

We would once more repeat the affirmation made by General H. G. Dufour and Gustave Moynier at the opening session of the first Geneva Conference which was summed up some 70 years later by Max Huber as follows : " To the objection which has often been raised and which continues to be in certain quarters, that it would be more important to prevent war than to care for its victims, that it would be better to create just and equitable situations in the world than to wish to make reparation for arbitrary action against an

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<sup>1</sup> See *Revue internationale des Services de Santé des armées de terre, de mer et de l'air*, Paris, November 1962.

isolated victim, one should reply that the Red Cross only admits of the principle based on a realistic and objective knowledge of the facts. Man will always be the victim of fresh disasters which, provoked by nature, will overwhelm him, extending and materialising themselves through his sufferings. To the victims of such disasters, against this inescapable reality, the Red Cross brings a solution to the realisation of which each one can contribute either by direct aid or through indirect support. Whoever is prepared, by his immediate presence, to accept to be of valuable assistance, will surely not be the last to act for a more propitious future. The Red Cross can and must transmit the spirit of peace, by which its members can give an example of disinterested aid, thus diminishing the barriers set up between classes, parties, races and peoples. To enable Peace to be maintained and preserved it is not sufficient for a Treaty to be signed, this peace should also take root in the hearts of men and women."

We have, unfortunately, had recent experience of tragic events during which the criteria of humanity seem to have been forgotten in the paying off of old scores of a civil war and in which one could see how the most brutal forms of torture and assassination were employed.

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Basing ourselves on these present observations we should insist on the place which medicine, and especially military medicine, ought to take in the world. It is only one cog in the machinery, but still one of the most important elements in the struggle for peace. Achieving peace through Medicine is an aphorism which has already found widespread understanding and we subscribe to it wholeheartedly.

Without any doubt, medicine constitutes a factor for peace among men, but it is only one of many factors and the pacific idea should deeply penetrate the minds and the hearts of men since it is the very essence of society.

Just as an individual cannot live entirely on his own or isolated from his fellows, so a country or a people cannot live by its own resources alone.

Each individual has responsibilities towards the community

and should feel himself bound to the people of his own country as well as to those of other countries. If this were not the case, he should at least understand, and this for reasons of common sense, that political conditions and social situations in other countries are constructive and can become decisive for better or for worse as regards its own prosperity.

This interdependence among peoples has become so evident that generous undertakings have been made from all over the world to organise aid appropriate to the under-developed countries, but this aid cannot be really efficient unless the confidence of the people in the countries concerned has been obtained. The Red Cross (Red Crescent, Red Lion and Sun) is a moral world force and a symbol of unconditional and free aid given. It is indeed an element for good, a means of understanding between peoples in our times which are so torn asunder and filled with such contrast. Under its sign, moreover, the fiercest political opponents find themselves together round the same table, prepared to negotiate and, under its protection, exchanges of prisoners can, for example, be made. Furthermore, the continuation of material and moral aid is rendered possible in time of war. For nearly a hundred years a considerable number of doctors, military medical orderlies, male nurses, nurses and Red Cross voluntary aids have worked for the Red Cross on many a battlefield, in medical centres, infirmaries and hospitals, often under most difficult conditions, in total disregard of their lives. For them there were neither friendly nor enemy wounded, there were only men, and comrades at that.

But this is the very principle of medical ethics and one of the most clearly defined objects of military medicine : to fight for real peace with justice and freedom, to combat war itself. We would however be failing in our duty if in conflicts, which today are still likely to occur, we do not ensure that the sufferings of the wounded, of the sick, of prisoners and of the civilian population are not mitigated to the greatest possible extent.

We all know these words of Montesquieu : " The Law of Nations is founded on the principle that countries should do each other as much good as possible in time of peace and the least possible harm in time of war." Mr. Léopold Boissier, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, also spoke in the same vein on Septem-

ber 15, 1959 at the first international Refresher Course for young military medical officers : “ If men must endure suffering, let this be as little as possible. This is the key-stone of the Geneva Conventions. Medicine also aims at the same end. The ICRC owes a great deal to doctors, several of whom having taken part in its creation and in drawing up the Conventions. By recognising and obeying this principle, the doctor of today is only applying these Conventions. He will, for his part, be helping to make them universal and to have them imposed on all men’s consciences, as being one of the primary gains for civilisation.”

We doctors must remain in the front line and should not only assure ourselves that the principles of the Geneva Conventions are known throughout the entire world, but also that the obligations deriving therefrom are observed and applied. The International Committee of Military Medicine and Pharmacy, since its foundation in 1921, fills an important and effective rôle in this sense. The international Congresses, the Sessions of the Office of Documentation which it organises, convening most of the Health Services, create and foster close co-operation and liaison between the members of these Services. Together with the “ *Revue internationale des Services de Santé des Armées* ”, it encourages the exchange of views, draws attention to technical discoveries and it attempts to bring about a standardisation of medical equipment and of medical treatment and to ensure closer co-ordination between different elements in the Health Services.

But personal contacts and real human relationships are no less important, if not more so, since they enable the establishment of a good spirit of fellowship with regard to ever-present demands of humanity and of medical ethics.

From this point of view the doctor’s personality is far more important than that of the scientist. For the soldier in a war the fact of knowing that the doctor is beside him and his confidence in the Medical Service means for him, in the midst of danger and destruction, a better world, a guarantee of security and sympathy more important than the best technical aid.

Starting from this principle, the XIIIth International Congress of Military Medicine and Pharmacy which was held in Paris in 1951, expressed the wish that :

“ The International Committee of Military Medicine and Pharmacy endeavours to give to all members of the Health Services of all countries, a unique, identical training, from the moral as well as from the professional point of view.”

And finally, after years of effort, it was possible to organise at Macolin in Switzerland, from September 11 to 19, 1959, a *First International Refresher Course for young military Medical Officers* : much progress had therefore been accomplished to have achieved this end.

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And now the success obtained by the IIInd Course arranged in Florence by the Medical Services of the Italian armed forces, under the direction of Lieutenant-General Dr. Mennonna, has confirmed to a spectacular extent the faint hopes formulated more than twenty years ago by the ICMMP, to such a point that the President of the Swiss Confederation, in a message which he addressed to me, suggested that study should be made of setting up a permanent, durable body to ensure the continuation of organising these international meetings and the unity of the principle of training young military medical officers.

In fact, the best of our young comrades coming from every sort of different country have been able, thanks to these courses, to get to know and appreciate each other. On returning home, they will be able to publicise and make known the spirit of a work accomplished in common and of a sincere and fertile international friendship.

Knowledge and conscience, military virtues and medical ethics are the bases of instruction for young military medical officers, and I am convinced that these courses constitute striking progress towards the realisation of our ideal. This is, the absolute necessity of close co-operation between doctors of all countries, in the spirit of Henry Dunant and the Geneva Conventions, of the statutes of the World Health Organization, of the unalterable principles of medical ethics and of the fellowship between all men of good will ; a modest contribution, on the international level, not only towards humanizing war, but above all towards the abolition of war itself and the maintenance of peace.