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DISEASE AND NON-BATTLE INJURIES AMONG NAVY AND MARINE CORPS PERSONNEL DURING OPERATION DESERT SHIELD / DESERT STORM

E. Shaw L. Hermansen W. Pugh M. White



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Report No. 91-44

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NAVAL HEALTH RESEARCH CENTER P.O. BOX 85122 SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92186-5122

NAVAL MEDICAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT COMMAND BETHESDA, MARYLAND





Disease and Non-Battle Injuries Among Navy and Marine Corps Personnel During Operation Desert Shield / Desert Storm

Eddie Shaw Larry Hermansen William Pugh Martin White

Naval Health Research Center Medical Decisions Support Department P.O. Box 85122 San Diego, CA 92186-5122

Report No. 91-44 was supported by the Naval Medical Research and Development Command, Bethesda, MD, Department of the Navy, under Work Unit No. M0095.005-6050. The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Navy, Department of Defense, nor the U.S. Government.

Summary

This study describes types and frequencies of Diseases and Non-Battle Injuries (DNBI) that occurred in a sample population of U.S. Navy and Marine Corps personnel deployed to Saudi Arabia during the Persian Gulf War. Data were collected at two U.S. Navy mobile field hospitals set up in northern Saudi Arabia during the seven months of Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm. A Medical Encounter Data Sheet (MEDS) was used to capture pertinent medical information during individual patient visits. The MEDS form is a modified version of an instrument used in earlier studies of DNBI during peacetime. Completed MEDS forms were forwarded to the Naval Health Research Center in San Diego, where they werecoded and the data entered into a computer file for analysis.

Frequencies were computed for each of the major illness and injury categories defined in the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD-9). The highest number of visits were for "Injuries and Poisonin, v" followed by "Diseases of the Respiratory System." These findings are consistent with earlier studies of DNBI among U.S. Navy and Marine Corps personnel under peacetime conditions.

The MEDS form proved useful as a means of documenting medical treatment information from deployed units. This data collection procedure, if used routinely by all deployed medical units during a conflict, could not only provide valuable information to medical planners for use during future conflicts, but could also prove useful in-locating problem areas where immediate preventative health care measures would be effective.

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Introduction

On August 2, 1990 Iraq invaded the independent Arab state of Kuwait. The United States participated in the allied response sending approximately 480,000 troops to the Gulf region, including 65,000 Navy and 93,000 Marine Corps personnel. Part of the troop deployment to the Gulf consisted of medical support personnel and supplies needed to provide health care and medical treatment.

Accurate determination of the medical resources required to provide medical care for troops in combat depends upon credible estimates of patient load. Although projections of casualty rates are clearly required to estimate patient load during combat, one also needs an estimate of the number of cases resulting from Disease and Non-Battle Injuries (DNBI). Previous studies have shown that DNBI can represent a significant portion of the total patient load. In a study by Hoeffler and Melton (1) on Navy and Marine Corps personnel from World War I hrough the Vietnam Conflict, consistently higher admission rates for DNBI than for battle injuries were found. Similarly, Palinkas and Coben (2) reported that during the Vietnam conflict, between 1965 and 1972, a higher number of Marine Corps personnel were hospitalized for DNBI than for combat related wounds or injuries. Further, a study of Army personnel by Reister (3) showed that the annual admission rates were higher for DNBI than for battle injuries during both World Wars I and II. This study also reported that during World War I, annual mortality rates were higher for DNBI than for battle casualties.

To provide Navy medical planners with needed DNBI information, a series of studies were conducted. Blood et al. (4), reported on the rate of illness for shore stations in various theaters of operation, including Southwest Asia, for two years 1976 and 1985. Other studies documented peacetime, (1980 through 1984) DNBI hospital admission rates for Navy (5) and Marine Corps (6) enlisted personnel in different geographic regions. Pugh (7) combined these peacetime rates with data on wartime DNBI rates to estimate DNBI hospital admission rates and sick list admission rates under low, medium, and high levels of combat intensity.

The Persian Gulf conflict provided the opportunity to gather information on the number and kinds of DNBI that would occur under combat conditions for which there were little or no data previously available. These data could be used to provide medical planners with improved patient load estimates for future conflicts. Such data would be particularly valuable because, in the past, only a limited amount of DNBI data has been gathered during combat situations. Also, because so few U.S. military personnel have been assigned to the Southwest Asia region, only a limited amount of DNBI data were previously available from that region. Finally, gathering DNBI data during this period would allow data collection methods developed and used during peacetime (8) to be tested during combat. Thus, the purpose of this study is threefold: 1) to test a previously developed data collection method in a combat environment; 2) to document DNBI during the Persian Gulf Conflict for two shore facilities; and 3) to compare numbers and types of DNBI that occured in the Persian Gulf conflict with DNBI incidences reported in earlier studies.

Methods

Patient visit data were collected at two mobile field hospitals set up in Saudi Arabia to serve primarily U.S. Navy and Marine Corps personnel during the Persian Gulf conflict. Figure 1 shows the locations of the two mobile field hospitals, Fleet Hospital Fifteen (FH-15) and Surgical Support Company Foxtrot (Foxtrot SSC) of the 1st Force Services Support Group (1st FSSG). To determine total patient load due to DNBI, all patients, including non-U.S. civilians and foreign military personnel, treated for DNBI at these field hospitals were included in this study. DNBI rates, i.e. number of cases per 1,000 troops, could not be calculated because of the constant and significant changes in the composition of the study population during the conflict. As a result, analyses were limited to the computation of frequency distributions and percentages.

Numbers and types of DNBI were gathered using the Patient Encounter Report shown in Appendix A. This form was developed for earlier studies by the Naval Health Research



Center (NHRC)(8) and was revised to improve its utility. The resulting Medical Encounter Data Sheet (MEDS) is shown in Appendix B. The MEDS form was used to document patients' demographic and service information, information about the type, cause, and location of the injury if the person was injured, the disease diagnosis, and subsequent disposition of the patient. It also captured the date of the visit as well as the treatment(s) that were provided to the patient.

Encounter forms, along with instructions for completion, and pre-addressed return envelopes were sent to medical representatives at the field hospitals. Additional forms were sent at regular intervals to ensure an adequate supply of encounter forms for data collection. Data collection started in September 1990 and ended March 1991.

All completed encounter forms were mailed to the Naval Health Research Center, San Diego, where they were coded and entered into a computer data file. The patient diagnoses were grouped into eighteen categories of diseases and injuries according to the International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision, Clinical Modification (ICD-9-CM)(9). Frequency and percent of encounters were computed by branch of service, type of disease and injury, date of encounter, and disposition after treatment.

Results

There were 1,820 MEDS forms received from the two field hospitals during the study. Figure 2 shows the number of patients by branch of service. The majority of the patients were Navy (n=1136, percent=62.4) and Marine Corps (n=575, percent=31.6) personnel. The remainder of the patients consisted of personnel from other allied forces as well as civilians (n=47, percent=2.6).

Inspection of patient encounters by month, (Figure 3) reveals that relatively few patients were seen during the first two months of the Persian Gulf Conflict. However, there was a dramatic rise in patient visits during the month of February 1991 (n=1049, percent=57.6).







Figure 3. Number of Patients Encountered by Month, Fleet Hospital 15 and Foxtrot Surgical Support Company, September 1990 - March 1991

The number and type of injuries by branch of service is shown in Table 1. The largest number of patient encounters was for "Injury and Poisoning" (n=438, percent=24.1). "Diseases of the Respiratory System" (n=346, percent=19.0) was the second most frequently encountered illness category. There were 192 cases that could not be categorized into one of the eighteen ICD-9 diagnostic categories. Diagnostic data about these patients were either missing because the encounter form was not completed or a diagnosis did not apply to the case (e.g., a visit for a routine physical exam).

The large number of patients seen for "Diseases of the Respiratory System" consisted mostly of upper respiratory infections (n=225/346, percent=65.0). The number of cases of upper respiratory infections rose sharply as the winter climate set in to the region (Table 2).

As Figure 4 shows, the majority of the patients seen were returned to full duty (n=1,297, percent=71.3). A small number of patients (n=174, percent=9.6) had severe injuries which prevented them from returning to full duty.

Discussion

In the period prior to combat, Navy personnel were treated at field hospitals nearly twice as often as personnel from all other branches of service combined. This result probably reflects the fact that the field hospitals were primarily staffed by Navy medical personnel, while Marines and other troops were deployed in field positions. During the five months of troop buildup (Desert Shield), prior to the air and ground war (Desert Storm), the maiority of the DNBI cases incurred by Marine Corps personnel were treated in the field because the degree of severity generally would not be enough to justify transportation back to the field hospital. At the same time, Navy personnel, who made up the majority of personnel at the field hospital, would have been treated for all their illnesses and injuries, regardless of severity, at the field hospital.

The number of DNBI cases increased monthly from September to December as expected due to the buildup of troops in the Persian Gulf. However, there was an unexpected

Frequency of Patient Visits by Diagnostic Category and Branch of Service, Fleet Hospital 15 and Foxtrot Surgical Support Company, 1st FSSG, September 1990 - March 1991

Branch of Service

ICD-9-CM Classification of Diseases and Injuries	Total(%)	Navy (%)	Marine(%)	Other(%)	Unspec.(%)
Injury and Poisoning	438 (24.1)	213 (18.8)	192 (33.4)	26 (35.1)	7 (20.0)
Diseases of the Respiratory System	346 (19.0)	290 (25.5)	47 (8.2)	6 (8.1)	3 (8.6)
No Diagnosis	192 (10.5)	117 (10.3)	62 (10.8)	5 (6.8)	8 (22.9)
Symptoms, Signs, and Ill-Defined Conditions	188 (10.3)	133 (11.7)	40 (7.0)	7 (9.5)	8 (22.9)
Diseases of the Skin and Subcutaneous Tissue	150 (8.2)	91 (8.0)	53 (9.2)	5 (6.8)	1 (2.9)
Infectious and Parasitic Diseases	98 (5.4)	59 (5.2)	33 (5.7)	4 (5.4)	2 (5.7)
Diseases of the Musculoskeletal System	96 (5.3)	54 (4.8)	33 (5.7)	8 (10.8)	1 (2.9)
Diseases of the Nervous System and Sense Organs	94 (5.2)	58 (5.1)	30 (5.2)	5 (6.8)	1 (2.9)
Diseases of the Genitourinary System	73 (4.0)	29 (2.6)	41 (7.1)	3 (4.1)	0 (0.0)
Diseases of the Digestive System	72 (4.0)	40 (3.5)	28 (4.9)	3 (4.1)	1 (2.9)
Diseases of the Circulatory System	30 (1.6)	17 (1.5)	(6.1) 11	2 (2.7)	0.0)
Supplementary Classification	16 (0.9)	13 (1.1)	3 (0.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Mental Disorder	12 (0.7)	10 (0.9)	1 (0.2)	0 (0.0)	1 (2.9)
Neoplasms	9 (0.5)	6 (0.5)	1 (0.2)	0 (0.0)	2 (5.7)
Endocrine, Nutritional, and Metabolic Diseases	6 (0.3)	6 (0.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Total	1820 (100.0)	1136 (62.4)	575 (31.6)	74 (4.1)	35 (1.9)

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Table 1

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Table 2 Frequency of Patient Visits by Diagnostic Category and Month of Encounter, Fleet Hospital 15 and Foxtrot Surgical Support Company, 1st FSSG, September 1990 - March 1991

Month of Encounter

Diseases and Injuries Classification	Total	Sep.	Oct	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.
Iniury and Poisoning	438	5	15	43	57	10	238	20
Diseases of the Respiratory System	346	0	0	ŝ	10	4	216	113
No Diagnosis	192		7	15	æ	0	113	58
Symntoms, Signs, and Ill-Defined Conditions	188	Π	4	80	9	0	103	8
Diseases of the Skin and Subcutaneous Tissue	150	0	1	80	7	2	67	35
Infections and Parasitic Diseases	98	7	0	œ	-	7	8	20
Diseases of the Musculoskeletal System	96			S	6		58	21
Diseases of the Nervolis System and Sense Organs	94	0	1	-	e	0	59	30
Diseases of the Genitolitinary System	73	0	7	7	7	0	39	23
Diseases of the Digestive System	72	0	l	9	6	ŝ	26	27
Diseases of the Circulatory System	30	0	0	0	4	0	18	œ
Supplementary Classification	16	0	0	0	0	0	œ	8
Mental Disorder	12	0	0	0	0	0	6	e G
Neonlasms	0	0	0	0	0	0	(۲	٢
Endocrine, Nutritional, and Metabolic Diseases	9	0	0	0	1	C	¢*:	6
Total	1820	15	27	66	117		1040	401

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Figure 4. Number of Patients by Disposition, Fleet Hospital 15 and Foxtrot Surgical Support Company, September 1990 - March 1991

drop in January, 1991. After interviewing personnel attached to the field hospitals, it was found that both hospitals were moved to new locations closer to Kuwait during this month. This meant that they were non-operational for most of this period, thus resulting in a much lower case load. The rise in DNBI in February undoubtedly reflects the fact that the United States troop strength in the Persian Gulf reached its peak during this month. However, other factors may have contributed somewhat to this increase. The onset of cold winter weather may have had an effect (10) or the stress associated with the start of the ground offensive may also have had an effect (11).

The large number of patients in the "Injury and Poisoning" category consisted mostly of sprains and strains of joints, tendons, ligaments, and adjacent muscles (n=154/438,percent=35.2). The majority of these orthopedic injuries resulted from sporting activities (e.g. football and volleyball) and accidents due to occupational hazards (e.g. slammed tank door on hand) or field living conditions (e.g. fell in foxhole). Sporting activities that involved contact were eventually banned for field hospital personnel due to the excessively high numbers of orthopedic injuries. A large number of the patient encounters, and thus medical \pm ad and personnel down-time, probably could be prevented or reduced in the future by a greater emphasis on personal, occupational, and recreational safety among deployed Navy and Marine Corps personnel.

The distribution in the number of patients encountered among the eighteen disease and injury classifications was consistent with the findings from other studies (4,6). Diseases of the respiratory system, and injuries and poisonings are consistently found to be common problems presented at sick call.

Since the majority of the patients encountered were able to return to full duty, DNBI's did not result in a large reduction in total manpower or require additional beds. However, the large number of sick call visits for DNBI's handled at field hospitals had an impact on the medical care system in terms of time and supplies required. Therefore, the number of sick call visits need to be factored in when estimating medical resource needs.

Finally, the large number of forms that were completed demonstrates that the MEDS form is useful as a means of documenting medical treatment information from deployed units. The standardized checklist format with ICD-9 codes allowed for quick and easy capture of all pertinent information by health care providers at the time of the patient visit. This data collection procedure, if used routinely by all deployed medical units during a conflict, not only could provide valuable information to medical planners for use during future conflicts, but could be useful in locating problem areas where preventative health measures would be effective.

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Appendix A

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Patient Encounter Report

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PATIENT ENCOUNTER REPORT

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TODAY'S DA	TE (MM/DD/YY):	NAME (LAST, FIRST, M I):				SOCIAL	SECURITY NUMBI	ER:
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Appendix B

Medical Encounter Data Sheet (MEDS)

MEDICAL ENCOUNTER DATA SHEET (MEDS)

I. PATIENT INFORMATION					
TODAY'S DATE: (YYMMITD) NAME (LAST, FIRST, MI)		SSN:			
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D 30300 ALCOHOL ABUSE	-!	5 FOREIGN BODY	EM	OUTH FCK	R HIP/BUTTOCK
OTHER, SPECIFY:		HEAT EXHAUSTIC	N GC	HEST	T UPPER LEG
EYE/EAR:	1-:	HEAT STROKE	H R I Si	HOULDER	U KNEE V SHIN/CALF
38010 OTITIS EXTERNA		POISONING	JU		W ANKLE
38100 OTITIS MEDIA 32200 CON HINCTIVITIS	$ -2^{2}$	1 PUNCTURE WOUR	ND KE	LBOW DREARM	X FOOT Y TOF
OTHER, SPECIFY:			M V	VRIST	Z DOES NOT APPLY
SKON	OTHE	R, SPECIFY:			
11040 FUNGAL INFECTION (TINEA)	}		·····		
68000 PYODERMA/BOIL/ABSCESS/CARBUNCLE	III. Di	SPOSITION			
13000 SCABIES		1 FULL DUTY	-		
G 68200 CELLULTIS		ZUGHTDUTY (# 3 NODUTY /#	Dave)		
	Ŭ	4 EVACUATED		I	
OTOTO WART		5 HOSPITALIZED			
70300 INGROWN TOENAIL					
FOR OFFICIAL LISE ONLY	NUC	C \$120 20 [11.00]			

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DATA CONTAINED HEREIN ARE SUBJECT TO THE PRIVACY ACT OF 1974, AFFORD PROTECTION IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECNAVINST 5211.5C

	- USE THIS	S SIDE FOR BA	TT <u>LE C</u> ASUALTI	ES ONLY -	
IV. CASUALTY PROFILE EC			SS TREA.MENT FAC	CILITY DATE: (YYMN	VDD)//
TRAUMA: Show TYPE OF W space to the left with the appr	OUND and LOCATION opriate letter from the L	l by filling the OCATION CODES.	CAUSE OF WOUND:	(Check all that apply)	
TYPE OF WOUND PUNCTURE LACERATION BLUNT TRAUMA	LOCATION CODE A SCALP N B FACE O C EYE P	HAND FINGER BACK	GRENADE BOOBY TRAP FLAME/FIRE OTHER, SPECIF	CHEMICAL BOMB MISSILE	
AMPUTATION	E MOUTH R	SPINE HIP/BUTTOCK			RESP.
BLAST BURN (HEAT) BURN (CHEMICAL)	F NECK S G CHEST T H RIBS U I SHOULDER V J UPPER ARM W	NECK SABDOMEN CHEST T BOWEL LEVEL OF RIBS U GROINGENITAL SHOULDER V UPPER LEG DAIN F UPPER ARM W KNEE	LEVEL OF CONSCION ALERT PAIN RESPONSE	USNESS AT TRIAGE:	TIME
	K ELBOW X L FOREARM Y M WRIST Z	SHIN/CALF ANKLE FOOT	MEDICATION		•
	72 72	TOE Z HEAD/SKULL		- DOSE/TIME/	
OTHER, SPECIFY:					
	st DEGREE 2nd		2-PANCHLORID	E • DOSE/TIME/	
BANDAGE	ING C] SPLINT] LIGATION] CLAMP(S)	□ □	- DOSE/TME/ - DOSE/TME/	
AIRWAY STATUS:					
SPONTANEOUS BREAT	HING 🔲 SUPPLEME	ENTAL OXYGEN	INTUBATED AS	SISTED VENTILATION	
V. DISPOSITION ECHELON L			ACUATED, WHERE		
VI. CASUALTY PROFILE ECH			SS TREATMENT FAC		A/DD)//
				INITIAL BP: PUL: TIME:	SE: RESP.:
HEAD NON-PENETRATII EYE FACE/ENT FACE/ORALMAXILLOFAI NECK CAROTID ARTERY JUGULAR VEIN TRACHEA/LARYNX	NG THORAX NC DIAPHRAGA BACK W SP CIAL BACK WO S ABDOMEN F ABDOMEN F SMALL INTE DUOOENUM	IN-PENETRATING LEEN SPLEEN SENETRATING SON-PENETRATING STINE	PANCREAS SPLEEN KIDNEY BLADDER GROIN GENITAL REPRODUCT. LEG	ABC PROCEDURES: TRACHEOSTOMY CRICOTHYROIDOTOM I.V. FLUIDS BLOOD (#UNITS) BLOOD COMP. (#UNITS CPR DEFIBRILATED	DEBRIDEMENT Y DINTUBATED VENTILATION (ASSISTED) S)
BURN - SPECIFY %BSA 1ST DEGREE	FOR EACH	3RD DEGREE			
SURGERY: Show PROCEDU the left with the appropriate le	2ND DEGREE JRE and LOCATION by ther from the LOCATIO	3RD DEGREE y filling the space to N CODE.		MEDICATIONS:	
CLOSURE A DEBRIDEMENT B AMPUTATION C RESECTION D FIXATION E GRAFT F I LOBECTOMY G C DRAIN H OPEN I STATION I DRAIN H	SCALP J UPP FACE K ELB EYE L FOR EAR M WRI NOUTH N HAN NECK O FINK CHEST P BAC RIBS O SPIP SHOULDER R HIP/	ER ARM SAB OW TBO EARM UGF ST VUP IO WKN GER XSH K YAN KE ZFO BUTTOCKS ZZTC	Domen Wel Koingenital Per Leg Jee Invcalf Kle Ot Xe ZZZ Head/skull	Туре Туре ОТНЕR Туре ОТНЕR Туре	Amount * Amount * Amount *
BURN - SPECIFY %85	A FOR EACH	UNITS (DURING	of Blood Surgery:	FINAL BP: PULS	E: RESP.:
VI.		JRU DEGR	55		
DISPOSITION ECHELON III: EVACUATED:	RETURNED TO DI	UTY (RTD) T SITE: FINAL DISPO IERE	OSITION & DATE		R
EXPIRED:	ASMRO CAT#				

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7. PERFORMING ORGANIZA Naval Health Rese P. O. Box 85122 San Diego, CA 921	TION NAME(S) AND arch Center 86-5122	NDDRESS(ES)	Re	RFORMING CRGANIZATION port No. 91-44
SPONSORING/MONITORI Naval Medical Res National Naval Me Building 1, Tower Bethesda, MD 2088	NG AGENCY NAME(S earch and Deve dical Center 12 19-5044) AND ADDRESS lopment Com	(ES) mand	Ponsoring/Monitoring Igency Report Number
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