

Homosexuals in Uniform

Although Army regulations strictly forbade the drafting of homosexuals, scores of these inverts managed to slip through induction centers during the second world war. Between 3,000 and 4,000 were discharged for this abnormality; others were released as neuropsychiatric cases. Last week, with most of the records on homosexuals tabulated, Army medical officers, for the first time, summed up their strange story.

To screen out this undesirable soldier-material, psychiatrists in induction-station interviews tried to detect them (1) by their effeminate looks or behavior and (2) by repeating certain words from the homosexual vocabulary and watching for signs of recognition. In some instances, the urinary hormone-secretion test showed a higher degree of estrogens (female hormones) than androgens (male hormones), just the opposite of a normal man. But this test was too uncertain and too expensive to try on every inductee.

Frequently, a latent homosexual, who had no knowledge of his predilection, was inducted into the service, only to develop alarming symptoms in camp and on the battlefield. Many of these men refused to admit homosexuality, even to themselves, and went to elaborate lengths to prove their masculinity. One of these ruses was regular and conspicuous absence without leave, always with female companions. Often the soldier's primary trouble was not discovered until he was haled before Army psychiatrists on an AWOL charge.

From case histories in Army files, these facts about homosexuals were gleaned:

- They topped the average soldier in intelligence, education, and rating. At least 10 per cent were college graduates; more than 50 per cent had finished high school. Only a handful were illiterate.

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Including all ages, there were more whites than Negroes in this group. They came mostly from the cities rather than the country.

● Although the majority had no family history of nervous or mental disease, many were from homes broken by divorce or separation. In many instances the man had been brought up by his mother as a girl, or had been an only son in a large family of girls. About half assumed a "feminine" role, the other half "masculine." Most were either unmarried or had made a failure of marriage.

● As a whole, these men were law-abiding and hard-working. In spite of nervous, unstable, and often hysterical temperaments, they performed admirably as office workers. Many tried to be good soldiers.

Once this abnormality was detected, the man was usually evacuated by the unit doctors to a general hospital where he received psychiatric treatment while a military board decided whether or not he was reclaimable. A good number begged to be cured, but doctors usually doubted their sincerity and recommended discharge. At least half of the confirmed homosexuals, one psychiatrist estimated, were well-adjusted to their condition, and neither needed nor would respond to treatment. The majority, therefore, were released.

The Blue Discharge: Early in the war, the homosexuals were sent up for court-martial, but in 1943-1944, the Army decided to separate most of them quietly with a "blue" discharge (neither honorable nor dishonorable) unless some other breach of military law had been committed. Last week, however, the Army announced a stiff new policy, effective July 1.

Instead of leaving service with the vague and protective "blue" discharge, the homosexuals who had not been guilty of a definite offense would receive an "undesirable" discharge. A few of this group with outstanding combat records might receive an honorable discharge. Those found guilty of homosexual violence or of impairing the morals of minors would receive a "yellow" or dishonorable discharge.