

DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT THE DOCTORS DID TO YOU?

Do you remember when the Army doctors counted your arms and legs; told you "Say Ah!"; counted your teeth; got you to jump up and down; then slapped you affectionately on the backside, said "A1 Army material" and booted you out to get back into your civilian clothes for the last time?

I was reminded of this rather forcibly when I had to undergo a recent Public Service medical examination. The circumstances may have changed, but the medical methods haven't.

The doctor was a benign old soul. He quizzed me over the top of his glasses and remarked "H'm, that's an odd name you've got. I once knew a chap with a name like that who did 15 years for embezzlement. Was he any relation of yours?"

I denied this with all the quiet dignity I could muster. But how can you muster much quiet dignity when you're sitting in a doctor's chair peeled down to your underpants?

"First of all, we'll test your eyesight," said the doctor, leading me gently by the hand. "Can you see that chart of letters over on that wall?"

"What wall?" I said, remembering the favourite joke when I became a handcuffed volunteer in the A.I.F.

The doctor let this pass, and coached me through the Swahili cuss-words you always see on optical charts.

ISSUED BY THE WAR OFFICE

After he'd done that, the doctor passed me over a little card of test types (marked "Issued by the War Office") and asked me to read to him the smallest type I could see on it.

I had to get out my reading glasses to do this. It wasn't easy making sense out of those little characters that you see in vest-pocket prayer-books.

"Well," said the doctor, when all this was over, "I wouldn't say your eyesight was too bad, but just the same, I wouldn't waste any time putting a deposit on a Seeing Eye Dog!"

Then he led me inside to one of those slabs that you see in all the best morgues, only this one had a sheet and pillow on it.

"Before I examine you on the couch, I'd better check your weight", said the learned man of medicine.

He put me on a sort of weighbridge, checked my avoirdupois against a set of barbell ends they use in the Olympic Games, made a few calculations on a sheet of paper, and commented:

"I'd say you were a chunky kind of character. In fact, you've got what the police call a solid build. But to be truthful, you've got a comic-cuts on you like a barrage balloon. It might be an idea for you to go on a diet of rye biscuits and cold water for about six months.

"If you don't feel like doing that, I'd wear a hat when I went out, or somebody's likely to mistake you for a run-away gasometer!"

JOHN HARNETTY ("C" Coy, 2/1st)

Insulting people, some doctors!

He then produced one of those evil-looking boxes full of glass tubes, rubber pipes and elastic bandages.

He put a bandage around my arm, pumped some air into it with a thing that looked like a rubber custard apple, put on his earphones, and started listening in to the Test scores, which must have been coming in loud and clear in my right wrist.

Suddenly, there was a loud pop, and the apparatus blew up. The doctor stood back bemused, then commented, with a wry grin, "That's the first time that's happened to me since I took the blood pressure of the fat lady in a travelling circus.

"And that blood-pressure of yours is a lulu. It's higher than a loan-shark's interest for a short-term credit on a gold-plated Rolls-Royce.

RYE BISCUITS AND WATER

He passed some more remarks about rye biscuits and cold water, then turned his earphones on to my chest.

He listened, tapping his foot, and commented "Struth, you'd make a fortune at a Highland Gathering. Your left lung is wheezing 'Rakes Kiddan' and the right one is belting out 'Paddy Kelly's Stump'. Got any Scotch in you?"

I replied stiffly that I was a total abstainer during Lent.

"That's a phenomenon and a half," said the doctor. "I'll write an article for the Medical Journal about it."

Then he whipped out a chunk of painter's scaffolding, rammed it down my gullet, and murmured reassuringly, "Just say 'Ugh'." (That bit was dead easy. What the hell else can you say when somebody's trying to throttle you internally with a lump of four-by-two?)

After he'd shoved the timber down about as far as my rib-cage, the doctor retrieved what was left of it, and remarked, "Pretty rough job they did on your tonsils. Did they operate with a buzz-saw?"

I replied that the surgical marks were just the results of a party joke when I swallowed a packet of razor blades without the wrappings.

"And that tongue of yours! Cripes, I haven't seen a fur coat like that since I was in the R.A.A.F. and the navigator plotted us down in the Aleutian Islands among the Polar bears when we should have been in Montreal", he said.

"That navigator must have been a prize mug," I commented sympathetically. "In fact, he sounds like the kind of clot who couldn't find a corner pub with a compass and a road-guide. Were you the flight-surgeon on that flip?"

"No!" said the doctor testily. "I was the navigator!"

Having got over this bit of bad judgment on my part, the doctor went on with his examination. He examined my skull, and gave a very professional "Tsk! Tsk!" as he fingered the scar that adorns my balding crown.

"A nasty crack you have there," he murmured, with just a mite of sympathy. "Was it a shrapnel wound?"

"It happened in Korea," I said remissively. "And all because I was a big enough dill to whistle 'The Battle of the Boyne' at the St. Patrick's Day celebrations of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers."

"Ah, well, now we'll have a look at your teeth," said the doctor, as he pulled out another length of painter's scaffolding.

He was kind about my teeth. He said he hadn't seen such gaps and holes since he took his wife on their honeymoon trip to Jenolan Caves.

TAPE MEASURE ON LIVER

He got down to my liver. He played a bit of a Bach Fugue on it, and his fingering was delicate, particularly in the pianissimo passages. Then he took out an inch tape and measured the liver. I might add that he nearly ran out of tape.

"What's the matter with it, doctor?" I exclaimed anxiously. "Are you going to send a description of it to a specialist?"

"Don't be a dope, you dope!" he snarled. "I'm sending these figures to the Rugby Football League. They'll make a design for a ball that will make me famous. But don't worry. I'll cut you in on the royalties. That's all. You can get dressed now!"

Then, as an afterthought, he said, coyly, "Before I forget it, you'd better go over and see Sister, and she'll arrange for you to give a Specimen."

Brethren, have you ever tried to give a Specimen, when your body says you can, but your mind says you can't?

I worked on this job with running taps, and succeeded in producing enough of a Specimen to fill the bottom of a particularly small eye-dropper.

I shamefully covered the pathetic Specimen with the towel provided, and embarrassedly confessed the drought to Sister.

She merely laughed, and said comfortingly, "It's always like that, so don't worry about it. You'll find in about ten minutes you'll be gushing like Burrinjuck Dam!" She was right!

I went back and clambered into my clothes, and the doctor was writing busily on his little pad. "Here's a chap I think you should see down the road. He may be able to help you."

"What is he, doctor?" queried I, with voice all a-tremble. "Is he a famous pathologist or some other sort of ologist?"

"No, dear boy, he's a lawyer, and he'll draw you up the nicest little will you've ever seen. That's all, I think. Goodbye!"

Somehow, I didn't like the tone of finality in that goodbye!

[Editors' Note: Thanks, John, for this excellent article and we do hope you will keep more coming along.—Max and Bob.]