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THE UNITED STATES ARMY MEDICAL DEPARTMENT AND ITS RELATION TO PUBLIC HEALTH[1]

By Major EDGAR ERSKINE HUME
MEDICAL CORPS, U. S. ARMY

AN army exists for the purpose of destroying the power of the enemy and preventing his retaliating in kind. The medical department of an army is, as are all branches, charged with doing all possible to bring about this end. Specifically, in the words of our army regulations:

The mission of the Medical Department is the conservation of man power—the preservation of the strength of the military forces. This is accomplished by the selection and enrolment for military service, through properly conducted physical examinations, of only those men physically fit for the performance of the duties to devolve upon them, by keeping such personnel in good physical condition through the application of modern principles of preventive medicine, and in furnishing those who do become disabled with such aid in the form of evacuation and hospitalization facilities as will speedily restore them to health and fighting efficiency.

This is a clear statement of our duty in general terms, and the manner of its performance in modern warfare may be appreciated when I tell you that, in the world war, 85 per cent. of the total number of American army battle casualties were returned to duty, and a total of 95 per cent. of the sick and ordinary injuries were returned to duty. And to those who do not know of the work of the medical service in combat, let me say in passing that though ordinarily considered "non-combatants," the casualties in our

[1] The fourth annual Delta Omega lecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, April 3, 1931. The Delta Omega lecture is delivered each year before the chapters of the Delta Omega Society of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and of the Harvard School of Public Health, and to it the public is invited. The Delta Omega Society, to which selected students of public health are admitted, was founded in 1924 at the School of Hygiene and Public Health of the Johns Hopkins University. Other chapters have been established at Harvard, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Yale, Michigan and California.