

## Civil Resettlement of Ex-Prisoners of War\*

By BRIGADIER L. BOOTLE-WILBRAHAM, D.S.O., M.C.

Before I begin to describe the aims of the work of civil resettlement as it affects repatriated prisoners of war in the Army, I should explain my own position. I am a serving soldier and I have little or no knowledge of psychology or psychiatry, other than the experience I have had since I have been put in charge of this work. I will, however, try to give an accurate description of the organization and administration of Civil Resettlement, showing at the same time the difficulties which we are trying to smooth out for the repatriates.

In August 1944, the then Secretary of State for War, Sir James Grigg, decided that the War Office "should undertake the task of correcting, so far as possible, those special psychological disabilities which inevitably arise from prolonged captivity in enemy hands". It was to meet this demand that Civil Resettlement Units were formed to look after the repatriate during his transition from military to civil life.

Records of the experience gained in dealing with repatriates in the last war were very meagre, but it had been recognized that in the months after repatriation men suffered from difficulties of concentration and loss of memory, from restlessness, irritability or apathy and depression. Towards the end of 1943 sufficient numbers of officers had escaped from Europe to warrant an attempt to be made to make a practical technique for their rehabilitation for continued military service. These officers were all posted to one unit (W.O.S.B.) where their difficulties were studied. In February 1944, some 900 protected personnel were repatriated and that afforded another opportunity of studying their difficulties and trying to solve them over a period of four weeks. This is described as the Crookham Experiment. Then in November 1944, an experimental unit was formed at Derby. It was organized to receive some 60 trainees. There were in fact two courses held, one of three weeks and one of four weeks, and the repatriates who underwent these courses were not in these cases volunteers. Finally in May 1945, No. 1 Civil Resettlement Unit with the Planning Headquarters, was set up at Hatfield House. From that nucleus was built up an organization which covered Great Britain and Northern Ireland and involved some 20 units which were spread from Edinburgh and Glasgow in the north to Sherborne in the south. It was finally decided that intakes to these units should be limited to volunteers. Any repatriate who has been a prisoner-of-war for more than 61 days could, and can now elect to go to a Civil Resettlement Unit, unless he has served for twelve months in the Army after the date of his repatriation in this country. It is considered

that if he has served a year in the Army after repatriation he should have sufficiently adjusted himself to conditions not to need the services afforded at a unit. There is one exception to this. If a man is recommended by his Commanding Officer and by the area Psychiatrist to go to a Civil Resettlement Unit, he can still come to one if he wishes. In addition, a repatriate may elect to go to a unit as a civilian at any time during the year after he begins his release leave.

I will endeavour to describe to you the problems which we find common to prisoners-of-war and these problems, it must be admitted, are by no means peculiar to men who have been in captivity. They arise not only from the circumstances of their capture and imprisonment, but are due also to long absence from home and to the life of routine and discipline which all soldiers are subject to during their military service.

During his service before and after captivity, the soldier has always been subjected to a routine; his life has been ordered and subject to strict discipline; his initiative has not been exercised so much as regards his own personal needs as toward the training and administration within the unit, and ultimately for ordeal by battle; his more personal problems have been looked after by the unit system. The orderly sergeant and orderly corporal have woken him at reveille; they have warned him for parade; they have inspected him to see that he is properly dressed and equipped; in order to help his memory there has been a daily detail or some form of daily orders; he has been clothed by the Army; he has had no responsibility for getting his own meals; his family allowances and voluntary allowances have been paid for him by the Paymaster to his relatives, and to this extent the normal military routine has helped to undermine the man's independence of thought. He has not had to think about all those things which in civilian life he will have to do for himself. Again, in the Army he has had companionship; corporate spirit and *esprit de corps* have contributed to the ordered life of his unit which, in return, has given him a measure of security. When he leaves the Army he misses this companionship and he may feel a lack of security. He may well wish at times to go back to his old unit and to his old companions.

There are also the problems of the soldier's domestic and social life. Most men in captivity have painted a very rosy picture for themselves of their home and family waiting to receive them on their return. The man himself in many cases seems to be unaware of what the war has brought to the civilian population in Britain, and he does not know of the stresses and strains to which his

\*Summary of an Address given to the Association of Mental Health Workers at Bristol on April 14th, 1946

family has been exposed. He little realizes the actual physical dangers to which many civilians have been subjected during the war in this country, and he little appreciates the war weariness which has touched the population. So when he finally reaches home, after the first glow of reunion, he is apt to experience a period of disillusionment which may make him depressed or moody, irritable and silent.

In their social relationships, men are sometimes shy of meeting their old friends or of mixing in crowds. As a rule there is a latent desire to meet people, to make themselves known again and to be brought up to date with the war history of their locality, but, in spite of this, when it comes to the point, men are overcome by shyness. This is particularly noticeable in their relationships with the other sex. Men become hypersensitive over their ignorance of conditions at home when they first get back from captivity.

After a man's leave is over, his first need is to find employment. Many men do not want to go back to the jobs they did before the war. Jobs in the mines, cotton mills, and in the potteries are generally very unpopular. Other men were only boys when the war started and their training may have been interrupted. These are now six years older, and they have a problem to face as regards how they are going to complete their training and at the same time earn a living. Yet others have had no training at all and are in need of it. These factors are alarming to the man and help to undermine his confidence in himself. In fact the biggest problem for many men is to regain their self-confidence. They may doubt their ability to resume the employment which they had before the war, to get employment suitable to them, or to earn the wages which will keep them and their families in comfort. In their absence their wives have had to assume responsibilities and cope with household duties which used to be the man's obligation. This has made the wives more independent. The younger children do not recognize their father, and the older ones may not accept his authority. These all contribute to shake his self-confidence. He finds that the relationship with his wife has altered, which makes him self-conscious and shy or resentful. These feelings may well be extended to the circle of friends who live in the neighbourhood of his home. It is a great problem which civil resettlement has to try and help the repatriate to solve.

To summarize the aims of civil resettlement. It is designed to give a period of temporary security, during which a man can experiment in suiting himself to a job and recover that independence of mind and thought necessary to the conduct of his life as a civilian; to make him assume the responsibility for his own life. Civil resettlement provides means by which he can test his skill at his trade or get sufficient training to recover the skill he may have lost. It also tries to make him aware of his problems by means of discussion and

interview, and, lastly, it helps to make it easy for him to carry his experiences in the civil resettlement unit to his home and to be able to discuss easily with his wife and family the problems which may embarrass them.

I will now explain how the Civil Resettlement Units deal with these problems. A unit is designed to take 240 repatriates at a time. They are organized in four syndicates, each of 60. There is a weekly intake which may vary, but has a maximum of 60, and that intake is divided equally between the four syndicates so that you have in the same syndicate men who have had four weeks or more experience of the working of civil resettlement, and newly joined men who have just been introduced to it. The syndicate is presided over by a Syndicate Officer. A man is entitled to stay four weeks at a Civil Resettlement Unit or he may leave at any time. If it is thought necessary, he may stay up to thirteen weeks. In addition to the Syndicate Officers there are, of course, the administrative officers and a number of technical experts. The A.T.S. have provided half the personnel of each unit and the feminine influence is of great value in the scheme.

The technical experts comprise the Doctor, the Dentist, the Ministry of Labour Liaison Officer, a woman Civil Liaison Officer (and trained Social Workers), the Vocational Officer and the Technical Officer. There are five units described as Type "B" units, which take in men who have been slightly disabled, and they have a small increment to the staff on the medical side which deals with physiotherapy and helps such men with remedial exercises.

From the moment a man joins a Civil Resettlement Unit we try to make him independent of Army routine. He is treated as an individual. There are no parades other than pay parade, there is no reveille and there are no N.C.O.s to chase him. He is encouraged to make his own appointments through his Syndicate Officer with the various specialist officers, but if a man is, for any reason, unwilling to go and see the doctor or to go and see the Vocational Officer, he is not made to do so. Such discipline as is exerted is done by approaching the man through group discussion, and to this method there has been quite a remarkable response. It is public opinion rather than the R.S.M. which enforces discipline in the unit, and I am glad to say that the morale in the units is, generally speaking, very high. In my visits I have frequently heard old soldiers complain that there was insufficient discipline in the unit. It is apt to shock them. On one occasion I heard of a number of Welsh Guardsmen parading themselves and marching into camp, I presume as a protest at the way in which things were done. The reason for the relaxation of military discipline has to be explained to them. Even so they are not always satisfied.

The Doctor's job is not limited to giving medical advice or treatment. He has an important function in conducting group discussions where he brings

up intimate topics with which men are concerned and tries to dispel those illusions which they may have engendered while they were in a prison camp. Many repatriates have formed illusions as regards sex and health, and it is important, particularly for their relationship with their families, that these should be put right. With one exception, units do not have a Psychiatrist. But they can call on the services of the area Psychiatrist when they are needed. This is usually arranged on the basis of a weekly or fortnightly visit. The Civil Resettlement Unit is not designed to take clinical cases which are sent to hospital. Such cases are rare. There is a Dental Officer at the Unit who is always hard worked, and he is able to send men out to civvy street in a proper condition.

The Civil Liaison Officer is a trained social worker. Some of them have taken psychiatric courses. Their function is extremely important in helping men with their domestic problems. Housing is the most common difficulty with which they have to deal, and the Civil Liaison Officers get in touch with the local authorities and do their best for the men. Then, of course, there are sadder cases of men who have unhappy homes and who are seeking divorces. Divorce procedure under the poor persons' aid organization is desperately slow. As a rule it takes three years for a man to get a decree, unless he is in the position to pay a fee of about £75 when his case can be taken at the local assizes in about nine months. But the Civil Liaison Officer's happier task is to do her best to get the men to bring their wives and families to visit the unit and to act as a hostess on these occasions. She may make an opportunity to discuss domestic difficulties with the family.

A Vocational Officer is there to give advice as regards employment. Where there is doubt as to whether a man has already been employed to the best of his ability, he may subject himself to tests and advice will be given to him as to what occupation is most suitable for him to pursue. It is our aim not so much to get every repatriate employment, but to see that he gets employment in the sort of job that will suit him and in which he will be happy, or to get the training for that job. To this end, the Vocational Officer works hand in glove with the Ministry of Labour Liaison Officer. The Ministry of Labour have been extremely helpful in all our work with them, and their Liaison Officers at each unit are amongst the keenest of those taking part in civil resettlement. My only fear is that there are times in their anxiety to get a man a job or train him for a job, that they forget that if that job is not one to which the man is temperamentally and physically suited, he will not be happy in it and he will not stay in it. The Vocational Officer, too, arranges for job rehearsals. A man is sent out to a firm to spend some days at work on the employment that he thinks he would like to take on. These job rehearsals serve two purposes. Firstly, on the positive side, they serve the purpose of confirming to the man that he really is suited and that

he really wants to do the job. They give him an idea of the conditions of work, the type of companions with whom he will work, the management under which he will work and the treatment that he will get in good and bad times. On the other hand, a job rehearsal may help to disillusion a man who has set his mind on doing something for which he is quite unsuited. I look on these rehearsals as being extremely valuable.

Soon after a man reaches a unit, he is taken to see an employment exchange. In the old days, these exchanges did not have a good reputation. They were associated with unemployment, the dole, the means test, and latterly during the war, with compulsory direction of labour to industry. It is of the greatest importance to a man that he should feel that when he goes to an employment exchange he will be treated sympathetically and intelligently, and I am happy to say that the great majority of men on leaving a Civil Resettlement Unit feel that they can get that treatment. Each man is interviewed by the Ministry of Labour Liaison Officer, who, in conjunction with the Vocational Officer, helps him to get the job or training for the job to which he is most suited. If a man needs training and is eligible under the Ministry of Labour rules, he can apply for a course at a Government Training Centre. This involves six months training at a centre, followed by eighteen months attachment to a firm. At the end of the two years a man can become a skilled worker or tradesman. Men are taken extensively on industrial visits where they get a chance of talking with the operatives and of seeing conditions of work in many varied industries.

Every attempt is made while a man is at a unit to bring him up to date as regards the history of the war. Each unit has a cinema, and educational and old news reels are shown as well as a number of the well known and best recreational films which have been produced during the war period. This helps to bring a man up to date with war conditions in Great Britain. Each camp has a theatre in which there is at least one entertainment a week, and there are usually one or two dances a week which help the men in their social contacts. Arrangements are made for local inhabitants to come to the dances at which the A.T.S. girls who work in the camp are a very great asset.

Group discussion is used extensively by Syndicate Officers, Seconds in Command and the Technical Staff, and is considered of good therapeutic value. The object of group discussions is to get the men to express their feelings and disclose their problems without embarrassment, with the hope that when they go to their homes they will be able to discuss their problems openly and without difficulty in the family.

Units have been located regionally so that it should be easy for every repatriate to get home at the weekend. Every weekend is a long weekend. The man leaves on Friday evening and must be back at the unit on Monday morning. It is considered of the utmost importance, if the man is to

be properly resettled, that he should be able to discuss with his family every week what has been going on at the unit. At one time it was thought that the wives of married men were, to a certain extent, antagonistic to their husbands coming to a Civil Resettlement Unit. They felt that their husbands had had their leave and that it was time that they came home and helped the family with their domestic difficulties. Some wives too, thought that the man was just having a nice cushy holiday. So we have done our best to open the units to receive the wives. In every camp there is one day a week set aside for showing the wives round the camp and showing what the unit sets out to do for their husbands. In some places, where communications are poor, a hut has been set aside in which the wives may stay a night. In fact, every encouragement is given to embrace the family in the process of resettlement. It has been possible on some occasions to get wives to take part in group discussions.

Not least important in the unit are the workshops. They meet two great needs. First of all the need of the man to do something creative with his hands; and secondly, they give a chance to those men who are tradesmen to handle their tools again and to regain some of the confidence which is necessary to them before they take on their old job.

From time to time suggestions are made that repatriates should be given certain privileges not available to the public. I deprecate these suggestions. The aim of civil resettlement is to enable the man to resume his place in civvy street as a normal citizen and not as a privileged person. It would be wrong if I gave the impression that the men who come to a Civil Resettlement Unit are particularly neurotic or in need of psychiatric treatment. This is not so. In my opinion a great many of them have resolved their own difficulties, if they had any. Others may well be able to resolve theirs without coming to a unit. They are mostly normal decent citizens, healthy in mind and body. They have been through a peculiarly humiliating experience in their imprisonment, and civil resettlement tries to eradicate the unpleasant results of that experience. In a voluntary system it would be invidious and impossible to sort out those who need a course from those who could do equally well without it. But even if it serves no other purpose, the Civil Resettlement Unit treats the soldier who has been a tiny component in the vast war machine as a very human being. He leaves his war service with a sweet taste in his mouth. The government machine, which picked him up in the emergency of conflict to mould him as a tool for victory, has not scrapped him after the conflict is over. It is, on the contrary, doing its best to put him back where he started.

There are other interesting activities in connection with these units. Each Unit has an Extension Scheme which was originally designed to screen the large numbers of men who were at one time time kept waiting for some weeks before they could

be taken into a unit. It has now, however, developed to advertise the value of the Civil Resettlement Unit in the region which each unit serves. It is felt that a great many men, for one reason or another, are not acquainted with the service which is offered them. We feel too, that the service which we give is of real value, so that we want to make absolutely certain that every repatriate has at least heard of resettlement and something of how it may be able to help him. The Extension Scheme is very largely dependent on voluntary organizations and government services, like the Ministry of Labour and the Police. Co-operation with the Red Cross and St. John Ambulance has been most fruitful. The Red Cross stands very high in the opinion of all prisoners-of-war and their families. A Red Cross welfare worker is attached to each unit and works in partnership with the Extension Officer and Civilian Liaison Officer. Such organizations as the Red Cross, W.V.S., S.S.A.F.A., C.A.B., British Legion and Regimental Associations are now helping us with an ambitious scheme for a house to house visit of all prisoners-of-war not now serving. It is hoped by this means to make known to all eligible repatriates the aims and services of civil resettlement. The Extension Scheme also serves in a few cases to give after-care. Men are released from a unit earlier than they would be otherwise when it is known that they can get assistance from the unit in their area, if it is needed.

One unit has been set aside to deal with the problem of officers. On the whole, a very much smaller number of officers have applied for a civil resettlement course and, generally speaking, we have found that their difficulties are more acute than those of the other ranks. This, I think, is very natural. On the whole, officers, all of whom have been leaders in some capacity during the war, would be less prone to seek help and more liable to try to solve their own problems. It is at this unit that there is a resident psychiatrist.

It might be of some interest to give some figures. The last statistical statement gives the following details: 15,650 men have been through units; there are now 3,621 at units, and it is anticipated that there are another 5,000 to come. This does not take into account those who may come as the result of the activities of the Extension Scheme, or those who may come as civilians during the twelve months after their release from the Army.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay a tribute to those who initiated this fine experiment. They are Dr. A. T. M. Wilson (Psychiatrist) and Lieut.-Colonel E. L. Trist (Psychologist). I would also like to couple with them the large number of regimental officers who have put the scheme into execution and in whose hands it now lies. Although these are early days to say how successful Civil Resettlement has been, I am convinced that it has proved of very great value to the large majority of the men who have been through the units.