

Murphy, (John Francis) Desmond ('Jack')

by Turlough O'Riordan

Murphy, (John Francis) Desmond ('Jack') (1913–2005), military psychiatrist, was born 22 May 1913 in Kilrane, Rosslare Harbour, Co. Wexford, the son of Francis Murphy, a merchant, and his wife Annie (née Murphy). After attending Clongowes Wood College (1925–31), Murphy studied medicine at UCD, graduating B.Ch., MB (1937). Undertaking his initial training in the UK, he joined the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) in February 1939. Posted to the Royal Victoria military hospital at Netley, near Southampton, in August 1939, he was with the BEF in France (1939–40), and served as a medical officer with the 1st Division, Royal Engineers, and with the 2nd Field Ambulance in the Dunkirk evacuation (May–June 1940). Moving to the 11th Armoured Division in 1941 as a junior administration officer, he rose to deputy assistant director of medical services. It is likely that Murphy was part of a team tasked with psychiatrically assessing Rudolf Hess in 1943 when he was being held at Mytchett House, near Aldershot. Murphy established the 7th Field Ambulance dressing station in advance of the Normandy landings and commanded it from D-Day (6 June 1944).

Moving westwards with Allied forces, he witnessed Antwerp's liberation. Lacking formal psychiatric training, Murphy established an impromptu exhaustion unit to treat soldiers recovering from shock and exhaustion after relentless fighting at the River Meuse (Maas), near Namur in the Ardennes. Murphy, seeing how short-term rest benefited only some exhausted patients, began to recognise the severe and lasting impact of what later became known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Contemporary military medical and psychiatric thinking, although improving notably over the course of the conflict, was largely blind to accepting that soldiers would break down, that 'battle exhaustion' might encompass more than mere fatigue, and that putative 'malingerers' might have fundamental underlying psychiatric needs. Murphy was part of a movement towards recognising the need to assess and treat the causes of weakening morale and to respond with psychiatric rehabilitation, on both humane and functional grounds. An officer's loyalty to the army and duty to patients were not always harmonious, and Murphy was part of a gradual shift led by J. R. Rees (the first director of army psychiatry and pioneering British psychiatrist), recognising the synergetic benefits of using psychiatric treatment for the good of the soldier-patient and of the military, engendering improved performance, resilience and morale.

Murphy recognised the deep impact of psychiatric strain on active troops – often manifest in depression, anger, and alcoholism, and impacting career, physical fitness, and hidden suffering long after leaving the forces – and how the catch-all diagnosis of 'psychoneurosis' commonly ascribed during and after the war, implicitly suggesting likelihood of abatement and healing, failed to identify and address deep

and lasting symptoms. This led him to focus on clinical psychiatry and eventually to a lifetime of specialisation in PTSD. Entering staff college (1945) before accepting formal training in psychiatry, he was appointed in 1947 to the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR) as adviser in psychiatry to the British Military Hospital in Hamburg, later moving to BAOR HQ, Bad Oeynhausen, North Rhine-Westphalia.

Murphy returned to Netley in 1951. There functional treatments were commonly deployed; insulin comas were induced in a dedicated 200-bed unit – which Murphy led as senior specialist in psychiatry – to treat schizophrenia and other psychoses. (Later randomised trials demonstrated that insulin lacked therapeutic effect, leading to its substitution with neuroleptic drugs in the 1950s.) Murphy outlined the organisation and functions of the unit in an article (1953) in the RAMC's *Journal*. From 1951 to 1952 he was R. D. Laing's superior at the psychoneurotic wing at Netley.

Murphy was appointed assistant professor of psychiatry at the Royal Army Medical College, Millbank, London (1953). After a posting to the British Military Hospital in Singapore, he returned to Netley, and was seconded to the National Health Service to establish an adolescent psychiatric treatment centre. He undertook a second tour with the BAOR (1962). Returning to assume command at Netley (1964), he established a postgraduate school for military psychiatry there, while also overseeing the demolition of the complex. He served as director of army psychiatry at the Royal Army Medical College (1967–70). While researching the psychological stress on soldiers undergoing training to resist enemy interrogation and indoctrination, he drew up protective guidelines to guard against such exercises inflicting psychological damage on those involved. In 1970 he was appointed commandant of the RAMC training centre at Mytchett, a rare distinction for a psychiatrist. Among his colleagues he was widely respected for his dedication, integrity and compassion. Promoted to brigadier (1971), he was elected a founder fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists (1971), and appointed honorary physician to the queen (1972). He retired from the army in 1973.

After retirement he served as chief consultant psychiatrist to the Ex-Services Mental Welfare Society (later renamed Combat Stress) for sixteen years, specialising in meeting the needs of former military personnel suffering from long-term effects of PTSD emanating from their active service experience. In 1988 he retired from Combat Stress to Hampshire. A keen fisherman, he spent spring and summer in his cottage in Wexford where he painted and wrote poetry. Murphy died 19 December 2004, survived by two sons and three daughters from his marriage (1943) to Ann Harte-Barry, who predeceased him.

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GRO (b. cert.); copy of notes from interview (Nov. 1998) of J. F. D. Murphy by Professor Edgar Jones; T. Corcoran, *Clongowes record 1814–1932* (1932), 279; *British Medical Journal*, 10 Jan. 1970; 6 Mar. 1971; 19 Feb. 1972; Roy Brook, *The stress of combat* (1999); Philip Hoare, *Spike island: the memory of a military hospital* (2002), 311, 315; *Daily Telegraph*, 26 Feb. 2005; *The Psychiatrist*, xxix, no. 7 (July 2005), 278 (doi: 10.1192/pb.29.7.278 ); Allan Beveridge, *Portrait of the psychiatrist as a young man: the early writing and work of R. D. Laing, 1927–1960* (2011), 27, 187

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