

Top Naval Doctors Err in Diagnosis

By Jack Anderson

It's an ugly Kremlin custom to hustle people who embarrass the regime off to mental wards. Our own Navy apparently used the same remedy upon a lieutenant whom the brass suspected of trying to duck duty in Vietnam.

The sylvan Bethesda Naval Hospital, whose doctors are the pick of the Navy, diagnosed the lieutenant as suffering from imaginary ills and put him in a mental ward for six weeks when, in fact, he had a hernia and a developing duodenal ulcer.

The ordeal of Richard Schaeffer, a junior-grade lieutenant, began when the Navy tried to ship him to Vietnam for work in a Marine combat hospital. The young officer, a clinical psychologist, complained of agonizing chest pains. He collapsed before his Vietnam orders went into effect.

Through the intervention of Sen. Hugh Scott (R-Pa.), Schaeffer was admitted to the hospital, which has ministered to the ills of presidents, admirals and other notables.

A Navy psychiatrist quickly diagnosed Schaeffer as a "sociopath," a condition often

identified with criminal tendencies, and consigned him to a restrictive psychiatric ward. Not only was his mail opened and read, but a Navy corpsman was also put at his side to take notes every time Schaeffer spoke with visitors, including his fiancée.

For six weeks, Schaeffer insisted he was not crazy and his pains were real. Finally, the brass decided to discharge him as "unsuitable" because of what they called his "passive-aggressive disorder."

Schaeffer was fed up with the Navy, but he knew such a discharge would blacken his career forever as a psychologist. He demanded a full hearing and hired civilian lawyer Jack May, a feisty defender of military underdogs.

May swiftly found that the Navy brass was determined to discredit Schaeffer by fair means or foul. He won an admission from the Navy Medical Center's chief legal officer that the personnel bureau, then weighing Schaeffer's case, had asked only for the derogatory material in Schaeffer's file. "BUPERS," as it is called in bureaucratese, specifically rejected favorable material from the file.

A civilian psychiatrist, Dr.

Hyman Shapiro, testified, meanwhile, that Schaeffer had no personality disorders. It was a "terrible thing," the psychiatrist added, for the Navy to try to make him out to be a mental case.

The Navy board fair-mindedly refused to heed the Navy doctor's demand for an "unsuitable" discharge and said Schaeffer was fit for service. But this encouragement didn't cure Schaeffer's chest pains. Disgusted with his care in the Navy's best hospital, he went to a civilian physician who discovered the agony was all too real. Schaeffer had a chest hernia which Bethesda incredibly had missed.

The Navy, unwilling to believe it could have made such a monumental goof, sent Schaeffer to the Philadelphia Naval Hospital for a new diagnosis. The Philadelphia doctors found the hernia. But sensing a lawsuit, the Navy tried once again to put Schaeffer in a mental ward.

This time, Assistant Navy Secretary James Hittle intervened to end the farce. He reviewed the case and ordered the Navy to give Schaeffer the honorable discharge he now sought. It was in the nick of time. A civilian doctor

found that part of Schaeffer's suffering also stemmed from a duodenal ulcer, which both Navy hospitals had missed.

FOOTNOTE: A Bethesda Naval Hospital spokesman said he could not comment on the case because all records on it were confidential.

Washington Expose

Fuel Shortage—Americans can expect nagging fuel shortages for at least five years. This will cause power shut-downs and brownouts. Result: householders almost certainly will have to pay higher electric bills for poorer service. Fuel experts point out to us that energy demands have been increasing 8 per cent faster than the population in recent years. Government agencies simply have failed to forecast and prepare for the rising needs. Coal, gas and oil companies have also held down production, our sources say, in order to push prices up. In another power grab, 11 of the 25 largest oil companies have acquired significant interests in coal companies. This gives them the potential to manipulate the fuel supply, thereby jiggering prices.