

# CONVALESCING IN THE BAVARIAN ALPS

By

MAJOR GENERAL GUY B. DENIT

A separate convalescent facility has been added to the United States Army's medical treatment program for occupation troops in Germany. Results to date prove that incapacitated soldiers can be speeded to recovery through a convalescent program which emphasizes exercise and atmosphere.

The newest addition to facilities of the European Command's Medical Division is a 200-bed hospital known as the EUCOM Reconditioning Center. The Center is situated in the Bavarian Alps at Garmisch, the former winter Olympic games site, only a few miles from the Austrian border.

Located in a hospital built in 1939 for the German *Wehrmacht*, the EUCOM Reconditioning Center has every modern convenience. Its light, airy rooms front on an impressive mountain vista. Here patients spend their convalescent days—many of them outdoors—receiving specialized treatment under the watchful eyes of Army doctors.

The Center takes up where formal hospital treatment leaves off. A soldier who has suffered a broken arm or leg, for example, and who has been confined to a EUCOM Army hospital for initial treatment, reaches the stage where no further treatment is needed. However he does require a relatively long period of recuperation before the injured limb is back in condition. Formerly he might have spent all his convalescence in a hospital or on sick leave without proper exercise. Upon returning to his unit, he rarely was physically fit to perform immediately the strenuous duties required. Under the present system, however, the Center makes an added contribution.

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Incapacitated service personnel who are eligible for transfer to the Center are cleared through the EUCOM Medical Division's Hospitalization and Evacuation Section to insure that there is space available. Upon arrival at Garmisch, each patient is classified into one of four groups, depending on his physical condition. Those in Group D are placed on an easy schedule of exercise and outdoor pastimes which include short walks and light gymnastics. By the time a patient has progressed to Group A he can indulge in very strenuous exercises such as commando training, thus testing his physical fitness to return to duties which may be just as arduous. The Group B and C programs are set up for intermediate needs.

Operated by the 98th General Hospital in Munich, the project is proving a time and effort-saver for medical officers, the hospital staff and the patients themselves. In effect, the Center frees more hospital beds for critically ill patients and reduces the time spent recuperating in hospitals.

Reconditioning exercises are fitted to the individual's needs. A soldier recovering from a broken back is taught archery at the Center because it has been found that the pull of the 45-pound bow, along with attendant exercises, tones up the back muscles. In most cases the soldier is able to resume normal duties as soon as the cast is removed.

The soldier with a broken arm plays tetherball which exercises all of the body except the injured arm. One with a broken leg or ankle may join similarly injured patients in playing a modified type of volleyball in which the participants are forbidden to stand or kneel; instead they must sit on the grass as they keep the ball flying over the net. In a completely out-fitted gymnasium the patient takes exercise commensurate with his physical condition.

Periods of convalescence at the Center vary with the type of ailment or injury involved. Hernia patients, for instance, normally require about 45 days for recuperation. Such patients spend most of that time undergoing a physical reconditioning program geared to their individual needs.

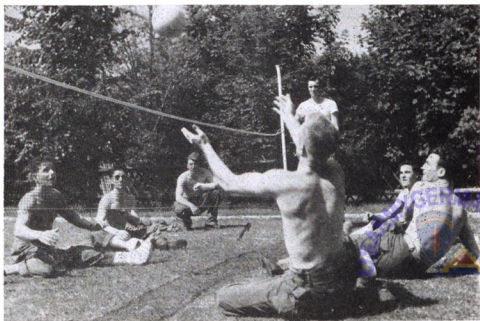
When the patient completes the prescribed recovery period, he is usually returned to his unit for duty. In certain instances—if his injury required a cast, for example—the patient is sent to a U. S. Army hospital to have the cast removed. He then comes back to the Center for another week or two of corrective treatment and a final check-up.

The patient's morale receives as much attention at the Center

as his physical rehabilitation. Activities are carefully planned to insure that there will be no let-down in his interests. The recreational facilities of the Garmisch Military Post are available to all patients. Tours are conducted through the neighboring countryside, including a weekend trip to Oberammergau, the Bavarian town which, every ten years, is the scene of the world-famous Passion Play.

Hiking, an important factor in any physical reconditioning program, is emphasized and it even includes mountain climbing for those who have progressed sufficiently in their rehabilitation. Patients look forward to the day when they are allowed to climb a nearby mountain, for it signifies their complete recovery. Some patients play golf nearby; others participate in swimming, baseball, tennis and similar sports. Plans have been completed for a program of cold weather activities.

Keynoting its operation, two dominant principles are applied at the Center. First, no soldier is discharged until he is deemed physically fit to rejoin his organization and take full part in its training program or its occupational duties. Second, the Center is designed primarily for reconditioning and not for the purpose of providing an enjoyable rest. In short, servicemen receiving treatment here are given the maximum opportunity to hasten their recovery so that they may return to their duties with renewed stamina.



U. S. Army Photograph

Convalescent soldiers play a "sitting" game of volleyball at the Center.