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Europe Hears a Message of Freedom

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The Junk War

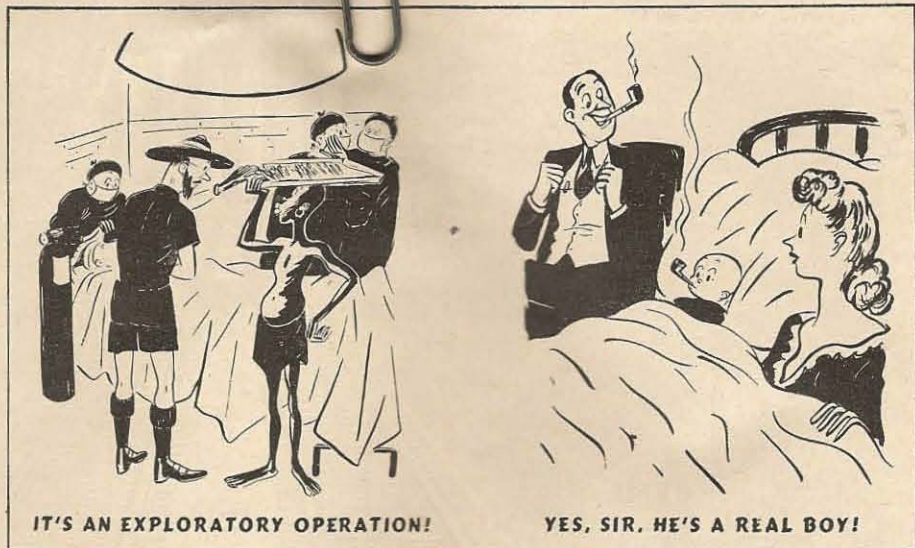
Karen Salisbury of NEWSWEEK's Washington staff is one of the few reporters in recent months to have an unrestricted look at the government's narcotics hospital near Lexington, Ky. Permitted to talk to prisoners (usually forbidden) and to attend an Addicts Anonymous meeting, Miss Salisbury came out with a working knowledge of the addicts' lingo ("Mable" for morphine, "Harry" for heroin) and the following report:

In the Kentucky blue-grass country, 8 miles from Lexington, the 500 staff members of the world's biggest and best narcotics hospital were struggling last week against the tremendous and frighteningly increasing problem of drug addiction. Ringed by the fabulous Kentucky racing stables, the USPHS hospital (nicknamed Narco) stretches over a green hill like a country club. The inmates are called "patients"; the guards, "security aids," and the disciplinary board is gently titled "the adverse-behavior clinic." The iron gates and window bars are painted soft colors of turquoise and rose.

Toeing the Line: This glowing surface does not disguise, however, the harshness necessary to rehabilitate the 1,000 patients now behind the barbed wire which surrounds the 1,100-acre estate. Mounted guards constantly patrol the fences, and iron grills and locks bar almost every door. A patient may write only two letters a week, and all of his mail is censored. He is allowed only a few personal effects—attendants hold these for him until his release. Upon entrance, his thorough physical examination includes a search of the body openings for hidden narcotics.

The staff members are courteous—and suspicious. The addicts, driven by an overwhelming need for drugs and aided by above-average intelligence, invent countless ingenious methods for duping the guards and obtaining narcotics. The patients often carry soap in their pockets to take imprints of the guards' keys, act out terrible agonies in the hope of getting a "shot" from the doctor, cut their tongues so they can pretend to cough up blood, and weave hard-luck stories to get special privileges. Some steal "just to keep my hand in," for stealing brings many the \$15 to \$20 a day needed to maintain the habit on the outside.

Shooting Gallery: The incoming patient is sent immediately to the withdrawal ward ("shooting gallery") for a nightmarish seven- to ten-day gradual separation from narcotics. Most of them have been taking heroin three or four times a day; the rest are addicted to morphine, cocaine, and other drugs. As the dosage of methadon, a synthetic morphine-like drug, is cut, patients get restless, perspire, yawn, twitch, gag,



Hospital Hilarity: Cartoonist Emidio (Mike) Angelo pokes this kind of gentle fun at doctors and their patients in a picture book "Just Be Patient," published this week (64 pages, Winston, \$1).

vomit, have diarrhea, and may lose 5 to 15 pounds in 24 hours. The patient reaches the height of his agony after three days with no drugs, but this abates after about seven days.

Next he goes to the convalescent ward ("skid row") to regain his strength, and finally into regular double-decker dormitories ("back into the population") for the rest of his 135 days if he is a volunteer, or for the rest of his sentence, if he is a Federal prisoner. About half Narco's patients are prisoners; some 37 per cent come voluntarily, and about 12 per cent, under Kentucky law, have chosen the hospital over the county farm.

Narco numbers 170 women averaging 35 years of age (average male age: 26) among its patients. (Male addiction is about four times as common as female.) The doctors find the female cases particularly discouraging. Hopeless, hostile, and much harder to handle than the men, many of them have been prostitutes in order to support their habit.

Urban Habit: About one-third of the patients, most of whom come from big cities, are Negroes, and one out of five is under 21. Illiteracy is almost unknown at Narco, and 10 to 15 per cent of the patients are professional people, including doctors, nurses, ministers, lawyers, psychiatrists, and a great many musicians.

Besides the professional set and the very young addicts, the hospital is heavily loaded with a group of cheerful old addicts who frankly mean to return to dope when they get out. Some of these (mostly morphine "junkies"), have been to Narco as many as 22 times. One, "Cold Weather" Kelly, comes in every fall. "When we see him, we know it's time to put in the antifreeze," one guard said.

Of 37,000 admissions since the hospital

opened, about 15 to 20 per cent are considered cured. Dr. Victor Vogel, Narco director, describes addiction as "a chronic disease with a tendency to relapse."

In a desperate effort to find inner strength, a number of addicts have formed Addicts Anonymous, patterned after Alcoholics Anonymous, a form of group therapy which, doctors feel, reaches in where medicine fails, and saves many apparently hopeless cases.

Addicts have need of this inner strength. Narco doctors have found that most of the patients have an emotional dependency on the drugs. Many are gentle, childlike people, dependent on their mothers and antagonistic toward their fathers. Some are homosexual, although drugs reduce the sex drive.

Younger Set: Narco doctors estimate that addiction to morphine and heroin has dropped over the years from 200,000 cases in the U.S. in 1914 to about 50,000 at the present time. But the big worry is the use of drugs by younger people (NEWSWEEK, Aug. 13) and the rising addiction to barbiturates ("goofballs"). Death from barbiturate poisoning is up 300 per cent since 1940. Although most states have laws controlling barbiturate sales, they are laxly enforced. Goofball addicts as such cannot enter Narco, because this form of addiction is not covered by the Federal narcotics laws, but many morphine addicts enter Narco with an addiction to goofballs as well.

Discouraging as the statistics are, Narco doctors feel they are making headway, particularly with the younger addicts, who started innocently and want to change. Dr. Harris Isbell, Narco's research chief, commenting on the situation last week, said that "even to save one makes the struggle worthwhile."