

## **CHAPTER 4 PREVENTING SKIN DISEASE**

**(NATO STANAG 2122, CENTO  
STANAG 2122, SEATO STANAG 2122)**

The mission of the United States Army Medical Department is to conserve the Army's fighting strength. You can work toward that goal by helping the troops prevent skin diseases. Detailed instructions follow which will aid you in your efforts.

## **Instruct the troops to:**

### **KEEP THE SKIN CLEAN**

#### ***Explain to them***

Cleanliness helps preserve the skin's health. Bathing removes dirt, decreases the number of microorganisms, and lessens body odor. For all these reasons, keeping clean is preferable to remaining dirty. In addition, showers are great for relaxation, morale, and personal comfort.

#### ***Point out to them***

If bathing facilities are not handy, they can keep quite clean by washing with cold water from their helmets. Potable water is preferable for showers but if not available, nonpotable water is adequate.

#### ***Caution them***

Soap and water must be used judiciously and properly. Whatever soap is used must be rinsed off completely. As to the type of soap to use, scientific evidence does not support the notion that germ killing or deodorant soaps or detergents reduce the incidence of bacterial or fungal infections.

Soldiers must not shower excessively, such as three showers a day with lots of lather. Too much soap and water removes the skin's moisteners and protective oils, causes the skin to become dry and irritated, and thereby reduces the skin's capacity to protect the body.

### ***End by saying***

Even though cleanliness helps preserve the skin's health, bathing cannot perform miracles in preventing skin disease. This is true regardless of the brand of soap used or the number of showers taken.

## **KEEP THE SKIN DRY**

### ***Explain that***

Tropical skin diseases would be greatly reduced if another rule of skin hygiene, keeping the skin dry, could be adhered to.

### ***Point out to them***

The realities of combat and military operations often make this difficult, but there are a few rules to follow:

Remove wet socks and boots as frequently as possible.

If dry socks are not available, wring out wet ones.

Rinse mud off boots. Mud on boots prevents drying.

Pay special attention to the skin fold areas—the armpits, groin, buttocks, and areas between the toes—where several common skin diseases can erupt. Dry these areas frequently. In addition, get in the habit of using talcum powder. These two practices will promote drying, reduce friction, and prevent infections.

Do not starch jungle fatigue uniforms. Starch clogs the openings in the cloth, blocks sweat from escaping, and therefore prevents the sweat from evaporating and cooling the skin.

Air the skin as much as conditions permit.

If underwear is aggravating an existing skin condition, do not wear it.

### ***Offer assistance to them***

In base camp, encourage the wearing of as little clothing as the commander will allow. Under some conditions, commanders may permit clothing, such as shortened fatigue pants, tennis shoes, or shower clogs, at base camp and particularly in the company area. It is the commander's responsibility to prescribe the uniform, however. The medic can only recommend a uniform that is consistent with command policy.

### ***Caution them***

Keep in mind malaria discipline. It does little good to dry the skin to prevent fungal infections, and then have soldiers become casualties from malaria. Fortunately, most malaria-infected mosquitoes bite from dusk to dawn, the time period when personnel can cover their skin.

Suntan alone has no proven value in preventing skin disease, although the drying action of the sun and air can be beneficial. A blonde or redheaded person, whose skin burns easily, should not try to get a suntan for hygienic purposes. Newcomers should start with a sun exposure of 20 to 30 minutes a day and should gradually extend the time. Remember the clouds do not block the burning rays of the sun.