

Medical Aftermath of the Persian Gulf War

The editors of the *Textbook of Military Medicine* are mindful that some veterans of the Persian Gulf War (1990–1991) face continuing health problems. Although readers might have hoped to find a discussion in this textbook devoted to the illness known as Gulf War syndrome, the medical aftermath of that war is incompletely understood. A formal academic treatment now would not only be premature, it would soon be outdated.

One fact seems clear at this time (May 1997): the scientific community has not yet reached a consensus on the medical consequences of serving in the Persian Gulf. Most observers agree that some of the 697,000 U.S. soldiers who were deployed there are sick and have wide-ranging symptoms, but the cause, or causes, have not yet been established. Investigations into the etiology and epidemiology of these illnesses have reached inconclusive and contradictory conclusions. Even the popular name of the illness, Gulf War syndrome, is perhaps misleading because the array of signs and symptoms does not fit the usual medical definition of a syndrome: a set of symptoms that occur together; the sum of signs of any morbid state; the aggregate of signs and symptoms associated with any morbid process that constitute together the picture of the disease.

The level of scientific inquiry into the problem, already high, has increased in recent months; we hope that these questions (particularly those pertaining to etiology and epidemiology, and from there, treatment) can be answered soon. Subsequent editions of this or other textbooks in this series will give the medical aftermath of the Persian Gulf War the attention it deserves.