

BOOK REVIEW

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Review of: Principles and Practice of Military Forensic Psychiatry

REFERENCE: Lande RG, Armitage DT. Principles and Practice of Military Forensic Psychiatry, C. Thomas, Springfield IL, 1997, 526 pp.

I served as a psychiatrist in the Air Force during the period of the Korean War. The guideline or manual for forensic psychiatric work at that time was a short bulletin covering a few major issues. Life for physicians then was simple and in many ways much nicer and less stressful than it is today when numerous rules and regulations, complicated and at times conflicting legal and moral principles, and a vast expansion of sociolegal philosophies play a dominant role in one's professional existence.

"Principles and Practice of Military Forensic Psychiatry" edited by Lande and Armitage with a diverse group of 19 authors is a monumental book covering an encyclopedic range of subjects confronting the military psychiatrist. I don't think that I have seen any book that covers such a wide range of legal psychiatric concerns—a presentation enhanced by the broad professional backgrounds of the participants. Thus in addition to clinical psychiatric problems in the armed forces discussed by psychiatrists, there are numerous expositions by administrators, judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, academicians, and those of interrelated backgrounds, whatever their military or civilian backgrounds or titles.

This book is a marvelous reference point for all psychiatrists, other mental health professionals, lawyers—civilian or military, and anyone else interested in the content or concerned with management of aberrant behavior. Military officers with administrative responsibilities will find much here directly applicable to their duties, and, of course, every military psychiatrist should have access to this book.

Beyond its military applicability, psychiatrists at large will find

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this publication a valuable tool. Much history of the broad evolution of the legal rules and practices in the United States is presented with numerous references to federal law and decisions applicable to non-military practice. Certainly academicians in the field of forensic psychiatry will find this book useful.

The broad panorama of information and discussion cannot be adequately summarized here. Some pertain specifically to the military. Examples are the ability to perform military duties, the extent and limits to military authority, ethics in the military, and combat matters. Others deal with conflicts now encountered amidst controversy throughout American life—such as evidence issues, credibility, sentencing, sanity evaluations, mitigation in criminal cases, writing a report, malingering, dangerousness, intoxication, stress and stress "syndromes," testimony, custodial practices, psychological autopsy, confidentiality, child psychiatry, malpractice, terrorism, and hostage taking. Thus the content goes far beyond mundane commitment, competency, and responsibility issues.

An important point to be made is that one must remain acutely aware of the lack of clarity and the haziness of guidelines that exist in the military just as they do in civil life. The authors carefully stress the unique nature of the military from many perspectives and the moral conflicts that may arise for psychiatrists in their dual roles as physicians and as agents for a hierarchical organization with a very important societal function.

Permeating the text is the elaboration of the special needs of the military where the value systems often differ from those in civil life and where the needs of society and the group usually supercede those of the individual. The armed forces have a key role in the stability and security of our country. Seeing that that role is accomplished reasonably and professionally is an obligation of all of us; this book certainly will contribute in a positive way to that essential process.

Conclusion—a very commendable work, treating military medicine with the respect it deserves, of great value to those interested in the important subject of forensic psychiatry, both in the armed forces and in civil life.