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AD-A207 116

MENTATION PAGE

Form Approved  
OMB No. 0704-0188

1a REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION (U)		1b RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS N/A	
2a SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY N/A		3. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY OF REPORT Distribution Unlimited	
2b. DECLASSIFICATION / DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE N/A		5. MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S) N/A	
4. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER N/A		7a. NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION Office Of Naval Research	
6a. NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION Merrifield Laboratories, Inc.	6b OFFICE SYMBOL (if applicable) N/A	7b. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) 800 N. Quincy Street Arlington, Va. 22217-5000	
6c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) 2723-B Merrilee Drive Fairfax, Virginia 22031		9 PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER N00014-88-C0061	
8a. NAME OF FUNDING / SPONSORING ORGANIZATION Office Of Naval Research	8b. OFFICE SYMBOL (if applicable) ONR	10 SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS	
8c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code) 800 N Quincy Street Arlington, Va. 22217-5000		PROGRAM ELEMENT NO 61153N	TASK NO 441 F830-01
11 TITLE (Include Security Classification) (U) "Investigation Of Stress Induced Alterations In Neutrophil Function"			
12 PERSONAL AUTHOR(S) Bowles, Charles A. Ph. D. Merrifield Laboratories, Inc. and Baum, Andrew Ph. D. USIHS			
13a TYPE OF REPORT Annual	13b TIME COVERED FROM Jan 88 TO Dec 88	14 DATE OF REPORT (Year, Month, Day) 10 January 1989	15 PAGE COUNT 12
16 SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION			
17 COSATI CODES		18 SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)	
FIELD	GROUP	Stress, operations, neutrophils, polymorphonuclear granulocytes	
19 ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number) This study involves measurement of neutrophil migration to FMLP, adherence, and oxidative burst capacity in medical students as a result of their participation in simulated field medical operations. Two studies have been completed, and findings from these studies suggest that the experience of the exercise was associated with decreases in neutrophil adherence but did not produce any changes in cell migration to a chemoattractant or in ability to undergo oxidative bursts. However, several logistical and assay problems arose during these studies; though these studies allowed us to resolve these problems, the data from these first two studies must be viewed cautiously. Replication of this effect in subsequent studies planned for the coming year will be necessary to draw firmer conclusions.			
20 DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED <input type="checkbox"/> SAME AS RPT <input type="checkbox"/> DTIC USERS		21 ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION (U)	
22a NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL Dr. Jeannine Maide		22b TELEPHONE (Include Area Code) (202) 696-4055	22c. OFFICE SYMBOL ONR

DD Form 1473, JUN 86

Previous editions are obsolete.

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE

S/N 0102-LF-014-6603

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Approved for public release  
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089 4 25 149

**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**Office of Naval Research**

**Contract N00014 - 88 - C - 0061**  
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Accession For	
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DTIC TAB	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Justification: .....	
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A-1	



## I. Introduction

The effects on immune system status and function have been of interest for many years, but it is recently that this topic has received extensive systematic research attention. Studies of acute and chronic stress with animal and human subjects have suggested that stress can affect immune system functioning by reducing cells' ability to proliferate when stimulated by a mitogen, by increasing the likelihood of reactivation of latent viruses, and, in some cases, by affecting the numbers of leukocytes and various subpopulations of lymphocytes ( cf Kiecolt - Glaser & Glaser, 1987 ). Though as a whole, unsystematized behavioral immunology has emerged as a rapidly developing field of scientific inquiry directed, in part, at better understanding the relationships between psychological and physiological events associated with stress on the one hand and immune function and health on the other.

During the past decade, research has clearly established links among the nervous, endocrine, and immune systems as well as demonstrating psychological influences on immune function and status. Research has indicated that immune responses can be conditioned ( e.g., Ader, 1981; Ader & Cohen, 1975 ) and several studies have shown that stress affects the strength of immune response to a variety of stimuli ( cf. Kiecolt - Glaser & Glaser, 1987 ). Studies have chiefly used lymphocyte proliferation measures in this work, counting mitogen - induced replicates of T or B cells and relating proliferative ability to stress or other conditions. Other measures have been used, including counts of lymphocyte subpopulations, natural killer cell activity ( lysis of target cells ), quantitation of antibody titers to latent viruses, tests of delayed hypersensitivity, and tumor rejection. Choice of measures in these studies is based on several factors, and has not led to uniform study of all aspects of immune function; instead, some aspects of immune response have been more fully studied than others. A relatively neglected area is the effect of stress on neutrophil, or polymorphonuclear granulocyte ( PMN ), activity and function.

One study examined the effects of a stressful 77 - hour sleepless vigil on phagocytic capacity of neutrophils. Rate of phagocytosis was lower during the vigil than before or after it, but some evidence of adaptation by the end of the vigil was also reported. Plasma cortisol and urinary catecholamines appeared to be negatively correlated with phagocytosis. A second study ( Palmblad, Petrini, Wasserman, & Akerstadt, 1979 ) measured PMN adherence before and immediately after a 48 - hour sleepless period and five days afterward. They found no evidence of significant

changes in adherence. However, measures in this study were taken before and after the vigil: no intermediate measures during the sleepless period were reported. It is therefore possible that observations of meaningful changes were obscured by adaptation towards the end of the session.

Neither of these studies can be considered conclusive regarding the effects of stress deprivation on neutrophil activity. Sample sizes were small, little information about the subjects was reported, and the difficulty in separating the effects of stressful tasks and of sleep deprivation cloud interpretation of the findings.

As the field evolves it is necessary to examine aspects of immunity not commonly studied and stressors that more accurately reflect stressors that might be experienced in real - world settings. Our approach has been to study the neutrophil, a basic, non - specific form of immune defense against bacterial incursion, and to examine the effects on this cell of a week - long Bushmaster exercise, a field operation in which military medical students are involved in a simulation of MASH operations. The exercise combines several forms of stress common in actual operations, including sleep deprivation, physical exercise, threat, uncomfortable living conditions, and evaluation apprehension. Clearly, it will not be possible to separate out the effects of these various stressor conditions so that we can determine those that have effects on neutrophil function. However, the naturalistic aspects of the exercise and the control afforded both in terms of conditions such as nutrition and of experiences during the exercise provide the opportunity of studying a real - world event under relatively well - controlled conditions. The Bushmaster exercise is held three times each year; during year one, we studied two of these sessions.

## II. Progress Report

### A. Research Objectives:

The primary goal of our research is to investigate the effects of stress during and after a military medical field exercise on neutrophil functions, including cells' ability to migrate, adhere, and undergo respiratory bursts. The relationships among adrenal hormones, stress, and neutrophil function will also be investigated. The exercise, called Bushmaster, is required of all fourth year medical students at USUHS and is held three times each year. Because of limits on our ability to assay large numbers of samples of fresh blood, and because each exercise session may differ slightly, our

strategy is to assess stress and neutrophil activity from several Bushmaster sessions and combine the data across a two - year period.

### B. Procedure And Results:

Since January, 1988, when ONR funding was completed, we have collected data from two sessions held near San Antonio, Texas. Our first assessment was a pilot study, designed to test the feasibility of procedures adopted due to logistic difficulties in collecting data. A total of five medical students and four control subjects participated, and we were able to collect pre - exercise, and post - exercise samples ( upon returning to campus ) on five of the medical students subjects. Controls provided samples once, at the time of the pre - exercise assessment for Bushmaster participants. The pilot was successful in establishing logistical arrangements and procedures for subsequent sessions, and findings from these subjects were of some interest.

→ Neutrophils were evaluated for random migration and chemotaxis using N - formyl - methionyl - leucyl - phenylalanine ( FMLP ) as a stimulant at  $1 \times 10^{-7}$  M in a 48 well modified Boyden chamber. The chamber was set up with the lower portion of the chamber containing either FMLP ( chemotaxis ) or culture media ( random migration ). A filter membrane with  $5.0 \mu\text{m}$  size pores was placed over the lower portion of the chamber and neutrophils at  $2 \times 10^6$  were placed in the upper wells of the chamber. Cells were allowed to migrate for one hour at  $37^\circ \text{C}$  after which the filter membrane was removed and stained before evaluating for numbers of cells migrating toward the chemoattractant using an Optimax image analyzer.

→ Neutrophil adherence was determined by adding cells diluted to  $1 \times 10^6$  cells / ml to a glass surface and incubating in a  $37^\circ \text{C}$  humidified atmosphere for 15 minutes. After incubation, the adherent cells were washed and stained with Wright's stain. The number of adherent cells were determined using an Optimax image analyzer.

Results of these neutrophil studies indicated first that the total white blood cell count for Bushmaster participants was slightly elevated ( Mean =  $13.3 \times 10^6$  ) immediately following the exercise as compared with pre - exercise levels ( Mean =  $11.8 \times 10^6$  ), but neutrophils isolated from the blood of this small sample of individuals were found to have a decreased ability to adhere after exercise. The ability of cells to migrate to a chemoattractant ( FMLP ) was not markedly different from neutrophil

migration of control subjects. Migration assays could not be performed on cells collected during the session.

The finding that cells exhibited decreased ability to adhere following the exercise is important because the overall function of neutrophils is dependent on their ability to adhere and provides a possible explanation for an earlier finding that chronic stress is associated with increased numbers of neutrophils in circulation. In a recent study, we performed WBCS ( with differential ) on blood samples collected from a small group of individuals living near the damaged Three Mile Island ( TMI ) nuclear station and from control subjects 80 miles away ( McKinnon et al, in press ). The findings indicated that the TMI area subjects had higher numbers of circulating neutrophils than did control subjects. Further, elevated levels of epinephrine were positively correlated with numbers of neutrophils.

The second Bushmaster sample consisted of six Bushmaster participants and three normal control subjects. Samples were collected from Bushmaster participants and controls twice before the exercise, at one - week intervals and once immediately after returning to campus following the exercise. Parameters evaluated for the second Bushmaster exercise included determination of total white blood cell numbers and neutrophil adherence, migration and oxidative burst potential of isolated cells. The results of these studies are presented in Tables 1 - 3.

Total WBCS found in the blood of Bushmaster subjects were evaluated both before and after the exercise compared to control subjects ( Table 1 ), although cell numbers were within normal ranges at both study times evaluated. The total number of neutrophils in the blood were also slightly higher after the exercise compared to controls and were within normal limits.

Neutrophils isolated from the blood of Bushmaster subjects participating in this second exercise again showed decreased capability to adhere to a glass surface when evaluated after the field exercise as compared to neutrophils from these same subjects tested prior to the exercise. Similarly, Bushmaster neutrophil adherent characteristics were less than seen with neutrophils from normal control subjects ( Table 2 ), although large variations in individual adherent responses in this limited group of study subjects prevents any meaningful statistical interpretation.

Results of neutrophil migration studies are presented in Table 2. Neutrophils from Bushmaster participants had a decreased ability to migrate randomly in samples tested immediately after the exercise compared to prior to participation and compared to control subjects. In contrast, chemotactic migration toward FMLP by Bushmaster neutrophils was not different than was seen when tested prior to exercise and compared to migration characteristics of control subjects. As with adherence studies, the limited number of study subjects evaluated to date prevent a meaningful statistical evaluation of the migration data.

Studies of neutrophil oxidative burst potential as measured in nitroblue tetrazolium ( NBT ) reactions are presented in Table 3. Unstimulated and FMLP stimulated neutrophils from Bushmaster participants had NBT reactions which were comparable at pre - exercise and post - exercise evaluation times and were similar to normal control neutrophil reactions tested at the same time points.

Neutrophil response data collected from the first ( pilot ) and second Bushmaster exercise were comparable and, as expected, refinement in logistics and blood handling procedures that were implemented in the second study provided greater clarity of results as the study progressed. Taken together, it appears in these early studies that the decrease in ability of unstimulated cells to adhere to glass surfaces is correlated with a decrease in the ability of the cells to migrate randomly, at least as seen in Bushmaster Study 2. In contrast, the cells appear to have a normal ability to migrate when stimulated with FMLP and a normal capability to undergo an oxidative burst reaction before and after the exercise. Additional studies of Bushmaster subjects will help delineate the relationships between migration and adherent characteristics. Definitive studies which might clarify this question would include evaluation of the presence of the adherent proteins MO - 1 on the surface of neutrophils from Bushmaster participants and the expression of these molecules following degranulation, a process that involves an oxidative reaction.

Hormonal assays on samples from the Bushmaster subjects have not been completed, but when they are, the results may suggest how the changes observed in neutrophil activity occurred. Of substantial interest is the finding that stress may increase the number of circulating neutrophils but after certian of their functional responses as measured in the initial assays. We are currently involved in studying the next Bushmaster exercise, with methods and assays developed in the first year.

The overall function of neutrophils, including the ability to adhere, migrate and undergo an oxidative burst reaction is important to understanding the relationship between these activities and the overall physiological status of the study subject and may provide an explanation for an earlier finding that chronic stress is associated with increased numbers of circulating neutrophils.

Further studies evaluating clinical outcomes in subjects exhibiting stress-induced changes in PMNs are needed in order to determine whether these changes have any significance for health. Clearly, both studies completed during Year 1 should be considered as pilot studies, and we are currently involved in studying the next Bushmaster exercise, with methods and assays perfected during the first year.



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**TABLE 1**

**"Mean Peripheral Blood Cell Numbers  
Of Neutrophils  
Before And After Bushmaster Exercise"**

<u>PARAMETER</u>	<u>NUMBER OF SUBJECTS</u>	<u>PRE-EXERCISE (MEAN ± SEM)</u>	<u>NUMBER OF SUBJECTS</u>	<u>POST EXERCISE (MEAN ± SEM)</u>
TOTAL WBC ( × 10 <sup>3</sup> /μl):				
• Bushmaster	6	9.0 ± 0.24	4	8.6 ± 0.23
• Control	3	8.2 ± 0.17	2	7.2 ± 0.04
TOTAL PMN ( × 10 <sup>3</sup> /μl):				
• Bushmaster	6	4.02 ± 0.10	4	4.36 ± 0.21
• Control	3	4.18 ± 0.04	2	3.60 ± 0.10

**TABLE 2**

**"Mean Neutrophil And Adherence Migration Characteristics  
Of Neutrophils  
From  
Bushmaster And Control Subjects Tested  
Before And After Exercise"**

<u>PARAMETER</u>	<u>NUMBER OF SUBJECTS</u>	<u>PRE-EXERCISE (MEAN ± SEM)</u>	<u>NUMBER OF SUBJECTS</u>	<u>POST EXERCISE (MEAN ± SEM)</u>
<b>ADHERENCE:</b>				
• Bushmaster	4	1,216.8 ± 232.8	4	945.0 ± 56.2
• Control	2	1,501.5 ± 67.5		N.D.
<b>BUSHMASTER SUBJECTS:</b>				
• Random	6	42.7 ± 4.9	4	21.0 ± 4.2
• Chemotaxis	6	181.5 ± 9.6	4	161.3 ± 10.4
• Stimulation Index		4.25		7.75
<b>Control Subjects</b>				
• Random	3	39.5 ± 2.5	2	26.5 ± 4.6
• Chemotaxis	3	157.7 ± 22.1	2	183.5 ± 11.0
• Stimulation Index		3.99		6.92

**TABLE 3**

**"Oxidative Burst Reactions Of Resting And Stimulated Neutrophils  
From  
Bushmaster Participants And Control Subjects  
Before And After Exercise"**

<u>PARAMETER</u>	<u>NUMBER OF SUBJECTS</u>	<u>PRE-EXERCISE (MEAN ± SEM)</u>	<u>NUMBER OF SUBJECTS</u>	<u>POST EXERCISE (MEAN ± SEM)</u>
<b>BUSHMASTER SUBJECTS:</b>				
• Unstimulated	4	160.0 ± 10.1	4	153.0 ± 18.2
• FMLP ( 10 <sup>-7</sup> M )	4	362.3 ± 20.7	4	384.3 ± 50.8
<b>Control Subjects</b>				
• Unstimulated	2	181.0 ± 6.4	2	129.0 ± 10.6
• FMLP ( 10 <sup>-7</sup> M )	2	415.5 ± 51.3	2	456.5 ± 11.0

**NOTE:** \* Mean Score -- 200 neutrophils were graded for NBT reaction on an intensity of reaction ranging from 0 ( no reaction ) to 4+ ( majority of cell containing NBT reaction ). The number of cells with each score were determined and the total score for the 200 cells were calculated.