



War and Whaling

WHALING in the Antarctic has been completely disorganized by the war. Even information about it has suffered an almost total blackout, partly because whaleoil products can be used in munitions, partly because the firms that normally produce harpoon guns and the explosive-headed missiles that they fire have apparently been drafted into war service.

Only a few facts have leaked through the wall of censorship and the fog of ignorance caused by disrupted communications. Some of these facts, however, are causing grave concern among scientists here who are interested in the conservation of the world's largest mammals, the whales.

Most serious element in the entire situation is the fact that the Japanese, notorious as the worst game-hogs among whale-killers, have the whole Antarctic whaling ground to themselves this season. The biggest European whaling fleet, the Norwegian, had not got home last spring when Norway was overrun by the Nazis; their ships are scattered and tied up in neutral ports. The German whalers, of course, are still in Hamburg harbor—if British bombs have not ruined them.

British whalers have not gone south this year. There was a two-year reserve supply of whaleoil in Britain when the war broke out, and there are large quantities of oil in the United States at present for which there is no immediate market. It is waiting, in bonded storage. Whale ships of other nations are negligible in number, and their present whereabouts is unknown.

All this sums up to one probability: That the Japanese whaling fleet, consisting of six factory ships and 48 attendant killer boats, will simply run amuck in Antarctic waters, recklessly

killing every whale they can catch, in complete disregard of international conservation rules—to which the Japanese government has consistently refused to adhere, anyway. The larger part of their catch will go to Germany, via the Trans-Siberian Railway, unless Balkan events cool off Soviet willingness to help Hitler.

Of course, if the Japanese choose to build up the reopening of the Burma

road into a *casus belli*, their whaling fleet will be a fat prize (in the most literal sense of the term) for the small but efficient Australian navy. It is the regular custom of the Japanese whalers to put into the West Australian port of Freemantle on their way to the Antarctic, for fuel oil and provisions, so that their movements must be fairly well known to Australian authorities.

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MEDICINE

Too Much Vitamin D, Calcium Hinders Healing of Bones

A NEW method of treating patients with broken bones which upsets present widely-held opinions was announced by Dr. Edward L. Compere, of Chicago, to the American College of Surgeons meeting in Chicago.

Patients with broken bones, he warned, should not be given extra doses of vitamin D or of calcium salts. Current practise is to prescribe large amounts of one or both of these substances because both are known to be essential for bone formation. Instead of helping broken bones to knit faster, this practise may actually retard or prevent healing, Dr. Compere declared. So much has been published about the importance of vitamin D and calcium or lime for healthy bones, Dr. Compere said, that if the surgeon does not prescribe these in cases of broken bones, the patients ask for them.

Experience with patients and experiments on rats convinced Dr. Compere that it is a mistake to give calcium and vitamin D beyond what is in the diet of patients with broken bones.

Broken legs knit fastest in rats that were on a good diet with very small amounts of extra vitamin D, he discovered. Rats with broken legs that got relatively large amounts of the vitamin or of calcium or both did not do so well. In this latter group the broken bones healed more slowly. In some the center of the callus forming at the ends of the broken bones began to die off, showing that something added to the diet had a poisonous effect on new-forming bone.

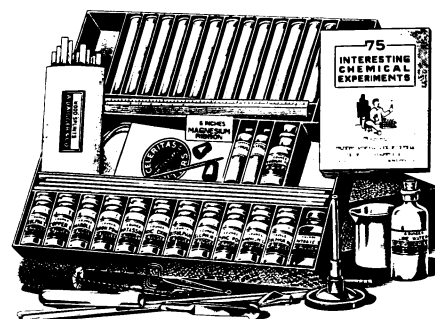
A patient who had been given enormous doses of vitamin D in an effort to speed union of a broken bone had, when Dr. Compere saw her, the serious bone disease, osteomalacia, instead of a healed bone.

Surprisingly, Dr. Compere discovered

that when rats were on a diet with too little calcium, although their bones were thinner than normal, the broken legs healed almost as rapidly as in rats on an adequate diet, and more rapidly than in rats on adequate diets supplemented with vitamin D and calcium.

Only exception to Dr. Compere's rule of not giving extra vitamin D and calcium in cases of broken bones is in infants. Babies, whether they have broken bones or not, need vitamin D to protect them against rickets. Older children and adults, Dr. Compere explained, can get all the calcium and vitamin D they need from their diet, and in the case of the calcium, or lime, cannot absorb any extra amounts even if they take it.

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