

Varied Breadstuffs

► IT MAY BE that the peoples who had the wisdom (or the luck) to choose grains as their staffs of life were given such an advantage in inter-tribal competition that they survived while others perished, either of famine or of warlike onsets from their better-fed neighbors. Whatever happened, it was all so long ago that there is no historical record of the event.

But however it came about, the fact remains that all human flesh is grass—grass only once removed. Probably earliest of the grasses that man began to cultivate was barley. Certainly barley shows up earliest in tombs and inscriptions of both Egypt and Mesopotamia, rivals for honors in antiquity of civilization.

Barley is well adapted for life in the hot lands of southwestern Asia and northern Africa. It can get along on a minimum of cultivation, grows successfully on either upland or lowland soils, and is probably the most drought-resistant of all the grains.

Barley was soon joined, in the Egypto-Chaldean area, by wheat. The early wheat varieties were almost as hardy and drought-resistant as barley. The primitive wheats, most like the early cultivated varieties, are still among the poor men's grains, cultivated in regions where our heavier-headed, "fussier" wheats do not like soil or climate.

Rye is another "poor man's grain." It never figured in the hot lands where we first heard of civilization, for the sufficient reason that it cannot thrive on high temperatures. Its hardiness is against cold and short growing seasons, and it can also manage to wring a crop out of thin, acid soils, such as are often

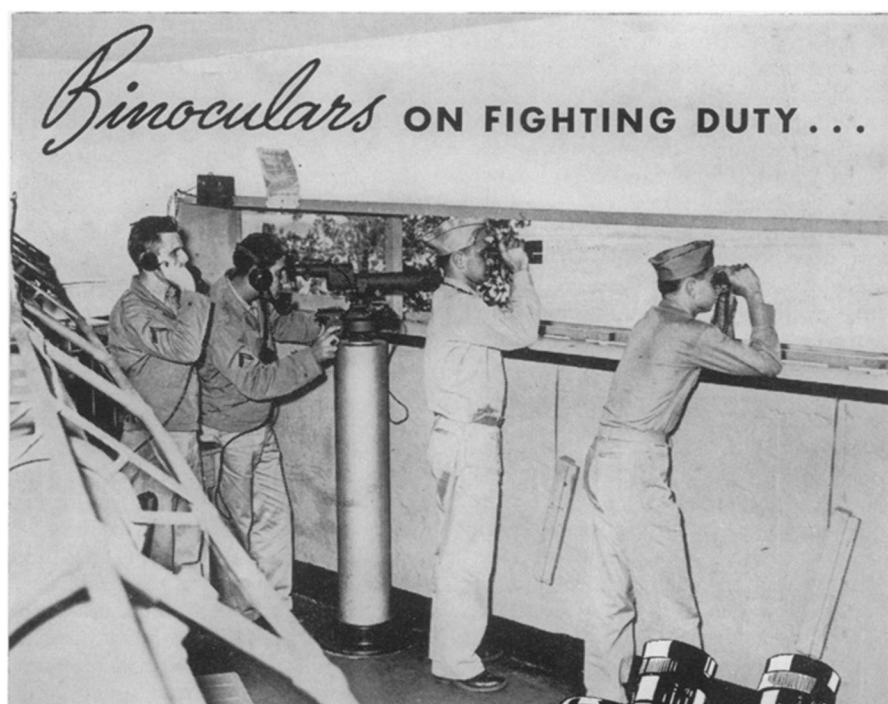
encountered in northern Europe. It is a practice in some parts of that continent to mix wheat and rye seeds, sow them together, reap, thresh and mill them together. In that way the peasant has some assurance of bread for the winter, no matter how bad the summer weather.

Oats is another cold-land, thin-soil grain. Oaten bread used to figure more largely in the diet of Europeans than it does now. Today, only traditional fondness for oats keeps oatmeal so prom-

inent on the Scottish bill of fare. Most other peoples have shifted their preferences.

The two non-European grains which white men have learned to use still show, by their relatively minor positions in the dietaries of most countries, the recency of their adoption. Rice, for most of us, is still something used in puddings and soups; corn (except in southern areas) is horse-food rather than man-food.

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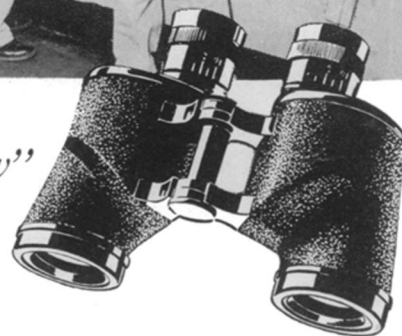


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