



Seals in Danger

➤ JAPS on the Pribilof islands, far north of the Aleutians in the Bering sea, would have little strategic importance. The islands are small, without good landing facilities, and too rough-surfaced to afford runways for planes. Seizures already made at Kiska and Attu are more serviceable to the Japs in these respects.

However, the little men from the East can do immense damage to a major American national resource, for these islands constitute the summer home of the great fur seal herd, where the animals mate and the pups are born and learn the ways of the sea. By making even a temporary landing, the enemy could practically wipe out the herd with machine guns and rifles, or even with clubs and knives.

It can be anticipated that the Japs will make such a raid—perhaps have already made it—for they will want all the furs they can steal, in preparation for their anticipated attack on the Soviets in Siberia. And since the fur seals are not Japanese property there need be no scruples on conservational scores.

If a landing should not prove practicable, it will still be relatively easy for the Japs to slaughter the herd from the air with light bombs or machine guns, and thus render the furs useless to the United States. Seals congregate in dense crowds, so hardly a bullet or bomb fragment would be wasted; and of course the poor animals know nothing about taking cover from an overhead attack. Indeed, they are so confiding that the regular method of taking furs is for men to walk among the bunched-up surplus males, or “bachelors”, clubbing them over the head.

The seals are exposed to possible at-

tack for a very long time. They arrive at the islands early in June, the last of the pups have been born by the first week in August, and departure takes place in November. The enemy thus has a good five months—and the whole mischief could be accomplished in a few hours. It might even be possible to follow the migrating seal herds in boats, killing them in the water, as was done before the recently abrogated international treaty forbade such pelagic sealing. This, however, would probably be

risky, for avenging U. S. planes and destroyers could pounce upon the boats and sink them. A mass raid on the islands while the seals are at the rookeries therefore seems much more probable.

Value of the Pribilof sealeries to the United States is indicated by the size of the fur take. In 1938, last pre-war year, it amounted to about 59,000 hides and this represented only about 2% of the total herd, which was in excess of 1,800,000 animals.

Science News Letter, August 22, 1942

MEDICINE

Army Health Improves

Massive infections of wounds have been eliminated by use of sulfa drugs. Vaccination prevents yellow fever, typhoid and tetanus. New evacuation methods aid recovery.

➤ MASSIVE infections of wounds among American troops, such as were common during the first World War, are now conspicuous by their absence. Phenomenal results of treatment of Pearl Harbor wounded, dramatically portray the advance of U. S. Army medicine, Major General James C. Magee, Surgeon General of the Medical Corps, points out (*Journal, American Medical Association*, Aug. 15).

“Carefully planned methods of evacuation, the employment of drugs of the sulfonamide group and the administration of blood plasma were the chief features,” he explains. “Wounds healed rapidly and cleanly. Less than 4% of the cases of extensive wounds, including compound fractures, became infected even to a mild degree.

“The mortality from perforating wounds of the abdomen, which previous experience had demonstrated to be 80% of all cases, was practically nonexistent. Many men have already returned to duty who would be facing the prospects of long continued hospitalization,” Gen. Magee concludes, “if they had not been afforded the benefits of the newest methods of treatment.”

The U. S. Army is the first in history to put into effect universal vaccination against dreaded yellow fever. Every member of the Army is also vaccinated against typhoid and paratyphoid fevers, smallpox, and tetanus. And the medical department is prepared to fully immunize the American forces against typhus

fever, bubonic plague, and cholera—if and when needed.

A corps of Army experts has visited and studied — often secretly — the preventive medicine and sanitation problems of remote and strange regions where history may decree that the fate of our nation will be decided.

Army doctors face new and difficult tasks never encountered in civilian practice, Gen. Magee points out. But research and organization has provided the U. S. forces with the best protection of health possible under combat conditions.

“The U. S. Army has played a leading role in this field of investigation from the earliest days,” Gen. Magee states, “and, as a result, some of the greatest advances in medical knowledge in preventive medicine have been contributed by medical officers of our Army.”

Science News Letter, August 22, 1942

● RADIO

Saturday, August 29, 1:30 p.m., EWT

“Adventures in Science,” with Watson Davis, director of Science Service, over Columbia Broadcasting System.

Dr. Gregory Bateson, of the American Museum of Natural History, will discuss Human Dignity from a Scientific Viewpoint.

Tuesday, August 25, 7:30 p.m., EWT

Science Clubs of America programs over WRUL, Boston, on 6.04, 9.70 and 11.73 megacycles.

One in a series of regular periods over this short wave station to serve science clubs, particularly in the high schools, throughout the Americas. Have your science group listen in at this time.