

VITAL STATISTICS

Marrriages Are Seldom Higher in Leap Year

► **MARRIAGE-SHY BACHELORS**, worrying because this is leap year, can find comfort in a report from Dr. Louis I. Dublin, chief of statisticians of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company.

Only twice since the Civil War period has the marriage rate been higher in a leap year than in the year immediately before or after. The two exceptional leap years were 1896 and 1920.

Prospects for an increase in marriage frequency this leap year, 1952, are unfavorable, Dr. Dublin points out, because the supply of available unmarried persons has been depleted by the spurt in marriages following the close of World War II.

Science News Letter, February 2, 1952

MEDICINE

Pets Cleared of Blame For Spreading Polio

► **YOU CAN** let your children play with dogs, cats or other pets without worrying about their getting polio from the pets.

Reassurance on this question, which worries many parents, comes from the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis.

For many years scientists have tried to find out if people can catch polio from animals, but up to the present time their answer is "no." While scientists working with March of Dimes support continue their search for possible animal or insect polio carriers, they believe that polio is more likely to be spread by close person-to-person contact of the kind that occurs in a household.

Certain animals do suffer from paralyzing diseases that resemble human polio. Chickens get "range paralysis." "Limberneck" is another paralyzing sickness that occurs in poultry. Dogs occasionally have "running fits" which may leave them with paralyzed legs. But a careful study of all these animal diseases has shown they bear no relationship to human polio.

The disease naturally affects humans only. Man is not endangered by his pets.

Man's primary role in the transmission of polio was underscored by a severe epidemic that struck an Eskimo village in the frozen Hudson Bay region, afflicting 57 persons representing about one-fifth of the native population.

Person-to-person contact, according to a scientific team investigating the Eskimo outbreak, was responsible for the spread of the disease. Flies and insects, sometimes suspected of being polio carriers, cannot exist in these sub-zero Arctic temperatures. Polio, in each case studied, was traceable to a visiting hunter, trader or missionary presumably carrying the polio virus.

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CARRIER ROBOT PILOT—First robot pilot designed for aircraft carriers is being demonstrated here. Dials show quartermaster the ship's course, rudder commands and positions calculated by the robot's magnetic brain as it automatically directs the vessel to a new course. The small ship's wheel is for manual steering.

TECHNOLOGY

Auto Pilot for Carriers

► **SOMETHING SOMEWHAT** similar to the results achieved by the automatic pilot extensively used in airplanes has been developed for the giant surface vessels known as aircraft carriers which are employed by the Navy to carry, launch and receive fighter planes.

This first automatic steering system for aircraft carriers, developed by the Sperry Gyroscope Company, Great Neck, N. Y., is a tubeless version of the Sperry electronic automatic pilot which steers Navy destroyers under control by radio from aircraft. A magnetic "brain" is employed instead of the electronic tubes.

Although automatic pilots today are common devices on merchant vessels, the Navy has not yet made them standard equipment aboard combat ships. Several, however, have been installed for evaluation tests. This first automatic steering system for aircraft carriers will be installed aboard the U.S.S. Oriskany.

The automatic pilot on an airplane carrier will perform a function not required in holding a vessel to a straight gyro course. It will head the carrier properly into the wind during launching and landing of aircraft. This is an important function. The operation requires keeping the wind a

precise number of degrees off the port bow to neutralize the turbulent stream of air which flows around the ship.

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MARINE BIOLOGY

Census Shows Many Kinds Of Crabs in This World

► **A WORLD** census of the kinds of crabs—the true ones that have ten legs—shows that there are 4,428 species of crabs.

An actual count made by Dr. Fenner A. Chace, Jr., Smithsonian Institution curator of marine invertebrates, shows that there are 8,321 known species of shrimps, lobsters, crabs and closely related crustaceans in the world. These include only the living species of the decapods, one of the major groups of the Crustacea, so-called because they have ten legs (five pairs), deca being Greek for ten.

This largest group of the crustaceans are still far from completely known and Dr. Chace predicts that the number of species to be discovered may be increased by 30% to 40%. There are 1,527 species of creatures related to but not really true crabs.

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