

CASTOR OIL HELPS ALLIES WIN WAR

Mussolini Used It to Pour Down His Enemies Throats, But U. S. Uses It to Lubricate Bombers To Smash Fascism in Europe.

By DAVID DIETZ
Times Special Writer

CLEVELAND, Aug. 4.—Castor oil is playing as important a role in destroying Fascism as it did in the rise of Mussolini two decades ago. But whereas the bullies of the duce's party poured the stuff down the throats of his enemies, Uncle Sam is using it to deliver bombs over Sicily, Italy and Germany.

The stuff is employed as a lubricant in bomber and fighter planes flying at high altitudes, as a hydraulic fluid in the retractable landing gear and as a drying oil for many of the varnishes and paints used on modern aircraft.

One result of the events after Pearl Harbor was to cut off America's supply of tung nut oil, until then regarded as indispensable for the paint and varnish industry.

Today thousands of tons of castor oil are substituting for tung oil. American demands for castor oil have quadrupled since Pearl Harbor and the government is taking active steps to insure a continuing supply. Through the Commodity Credit Corp., arrangements have been made to purchase 225,000 tons of castor seeds during the next two years.

Recently the United Fruit Co. planted 500 acres of castor plants in Honduras, near La Lima. Brazil, however, remains the chief source of castor seeds in the Western Hemisphere.

Tropical Grass

The United States has had to turn increasingly to tropical America for supplies that once came from the Middle East, half-way around the world.

Among these is a tropical grass known as cymbopogon. Before Pearl Harbor something like 500 tons of this stuff was exported annually from British East India, Madagascar and the Comoro islands. Most of it went to the United States and France.

You might wonder what it was good for. Another name for cymbopogon is lemon grass. It and not lemons frequently supplied the pleasant lemon-like scent found in certain soaps, cosmetics, etc.

A number of Central American countries are now growing lemon grass for the American market. This country can use 250 tons of it a year. High-yielding Ceylonese and Javanese strains have been imported into Central America.

The grass is heavy-stemmed and coarse-bladed. It grows quickly and is ready for harvest at the end of a year. It is mowed down like hay but distilled at once under high steam pressure. If the soil is right, one acre will produce three tons of it. That much grass will yield about 40 pounds of oil.

Grow Citronella

Another crop now being introduced into Central America is citronella. The supply of this was likewise cut off after Pearl Harbor. To most people citronella spells insecticides or fly sprays, but it has many other uses.

The oil is the starting point for the manufacture of many perfumes, cosmetics, toilet soaps and pharmaceuticals.

A tropical grass known as citronella grass or seroh grass is the raw material from which citronella oil is distilled. The oil was originally made from wild grass gathered in Ceylon, but 40 years ago Dutch botanists turned their attention to the development of improved strains.

In 1940 the world was using about 2600 tons of citronella oil of which 2000 tons came from Java. Most of the remainder came from Ceylon. American industries consumed nearly two thirds of the world's output.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that the end of world war II will see the Middle East in competition with Central America for many of its old markets. These markets, it is clear, were chiefly those in the United States.

How this competition goes will depend upon many factors, but it should be evident that the transportation situation will favor Central America.

In many instances, however, the battle will become triangular as synthetic products enter the field. Thus, for example, long before world war II a Japanese monopoly in camphor was broken by American chemists who developed a way

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