

THE SCOURGE OF AFRICA.

From Biblical times the red locust has been one of the plagues of Africa but nowhere in Africa will you see swarms of the flying destruction like this. Shots like this belong in the archives thanks to the relentless war that is waged on the locusts. The centre of this international war is situated in Northern Rhodesia in the town of Abercorn. And it is there that we must go for scenes of this highly organised battle between men and the locust that would eat their food, for the nerve centre and headquarters of this great international effort is strategically situated in Abercorn. The countries contributing to this service are Belgium, Portugal, South Africa and Great Britain. It is a far flung war in which international boundaries mean little. To headquarters come reports from infested areas and acting on such information, the director can co-ordinate all campaigns. As far back as the year 1930 great swarms of locusts were reported in the Mweru district. They spread and by 1932 had reached Salisbury in Southern Rhodesia sweeping onward; by 1934 they spread Westward to the coast of Angola and southward to the coast of Natal. In the next six years the swarms receded owing to scientific combat methods and today the red locust has been driven back to its breeding grounds in the Mweru Marsh and the Rukwa Valley. The Rukwa Valley is part of the Rukwa Basin, an area that covers 40 thousand square miles. That alone should indicate the task's magnitude. However, nothing daunted, research stations have been set up to study the most effective ways of tackling the problem. Most important, of course, is to know the locust itself, its breeding habits and feeding habits and, of course, its weaknesses. Then, too, adult locusts are more easily studied under control. Comparatively recently tremendous aid to these scattered operations, particularly in areas that can be cut off by rain, is radio. All-in-all it is a complicated operation and the key-men are the field-workers. No praise can be too high for these men who are prepared to suffer great hardships. It is one thing to plan an operation from a map but particularly in this part of the world, quite another to carry it out - for the actual locust control is performed in the rainy season. Bugged down lorries are every-day curses. Experience and vigorous rocking usually get them out, but not always. Sometimes an S.O.S. is sent to the nearest half-track vehicle and conditions must be shocking if that doesn't do the trick. The snag is, of course, that there's nothing to prevent sticking again within a matter of minutes.

Travelling by land rover can be tricky, sticky and damp as well. Much of the terrain is marshy and visibility is decidedly limited. A useful trick though an old one, is to send waders through - if they disappear up to their becks, you don't try crossing.

Its all clear and quite safe. These are only some examples of hardships faced in the course of the job. Its rough going all the time, it has to be, for it is the locust that has selected the battlefield. Yet the International Red Locust Control Service refuses to be stopped.

Modern insecticides like BHC have brought an important change to the locust war. By using special equipment, those in powder form can be blown over extensive areas cheaply and quickly, either from light land rovers or from heavier half-tracks. It would seem, however, that this form of attack is more effective against the hoppers during the wet season than against the adults later on. Another point to be considered is the possible effect of the upsetting of the balance of nature through frequent dusting. There is no single complete answer to the problem. No panacea. But more is being learnt all the time and the process of trial and error is having effect, and uphill though it is, the fight goes on. Isolated concentrations are attacked on foot with liquid insecticides sprayed from pumps. The weapon is double-edged for it not only kills the locust directly but poisons the food he eats. But what a toil for the men in the field! And the end is not yet in sight. The persistent locust breeds in its millions, and is slaughtered in its millions. Gradually perhaps the

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