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Russians and Yankees Battle Mosquitoes on Cranberry Isles

An Expert Leads the Forces and Guarantees to Drive the Pests Out or No Pay

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Northeast Harbor, Me.

Eighteen Russians and native Yankees are fighting a desperate battle on the Cranberry Isles that shelter the south side of Mt. Desert from fury of the seas. This little army, by a major who saw service during the World War with the American Forces, is conducting a magnificent trench campaign in the swamp lands of the islands. Day in and day out they are combating their enemy with a scientific gusto and to date your correspondent at the front is able to report several striking victories. It is revealing no military secret to report that the allied forces have the enemy on the run. The campaign should end by the middle of September, thus allowing the Russians and Yanks to return to their headquarters, completely victorious over an enemy that has ruled these islands with a wicked and despotic hand these many years.

The cruel enemy, which these staunch allies have been fighting since the late spring, bear the romantic names of *Aedes Sollicitans* and *Aedes Sylvestris*. In other words, they are the common and pestiferous mosquito.

For a long time now these despicable little insects with their vampirous probosci have sucked much of the pleasure out of living on the Cranberry Islands -- islands, by the way, which experts unanimously declare to be the most beautiful anywhere on the coast from Boston to Eastport. In late seasons they have become so prolific that to venture from one's house after dark was a sure means of returning covered with lumps which in size and number rivaled the final sketch in a boisterous domestic squabble between A. Mutt and his angular wife [from Bud Fisher's comic strip *Mutt & Jeff* (1907-1982), the characters Augustus Mutt and his unnamed wife, always called by him "M'love"]. Already this season the diminution of the pesky hordes is noticed. Next year, says the ex-Army major, they will be as scarce as harmony at a Democratic convention.

Moorfield Storey Responsible

The entire battle started last summer. Natives and rusticators, as the summer residents are called hereabouts, were so annoyed by the pests that the limit of their patience was nearly reached. The honorable Moorfield Storey of Boston, who has maintained a summer home on Buttermilk Hill on Great Cranberry Island, the largest and most beautiful of the four islands that make up the Cranberry group, was more annoyed than anyone else. At least he showed his annoyance in the most pronounced manner. Owning, as he does, a large part of

the island and five houses in the most desirable section, he felt that "something must be done about it." For thirty years he has been a benefactor of the island and its people, his knowledge of this region stretching almost as far back as that of the late president of Harvard, Charles Eliot, delightful if not wholly accurate biographer of John Gilley. At first he intended to spray the island with some anti-mosquito poison from an airplane. But this idea was soon abandoned, as was the even more Herculean method of stripping the island of its unspoiled and untrammelled underbrush. He learned that neither was the effective way.

After due deliberation on the subject, accompanied by much swatting at the face and neck, Mr. Storey called in the experts. He got in touch with The Gorgas Memorial and just a year ago a bronzed and competent-appearing engineer stepped ashore at the "steamboat wharf" in Spurling's Cove. He was invited to take a walk at dusk and after traversing the mile and a half of road on the island he is unofficially declared to have breathed a fervent request to be sent back immediately to Jersey. This experienced engineer, however, who is now in charge of the combined forces of Russian and Yankee ditch diggers, was sprayed with Flit and covered with netting and induced to stay. He did, and after he went back to his headquarters in Chicago, he is said to have remarked that General Gorgas had cleaned up Panama but he had never seen the Cranberry Isles. But inasmuch as it is the boast of the mosquito division of the Gorgas Memorial that it caused all the screens of Flushing, L.I., to be burned for firewood, Major Edwin M. Skinner, the engineer, decided that he could and would rid the Cranberry Isles of their one and only disagreeable feature. It is the first place anywhere in the State of Maine that mosquito eradication will have been attempted.

Where Water Runs Freely

He came back and gave the people a talk. He told them it could be done and how and what it would cost. He also told them that the Gorgas Memorial was not only a non-profit-making organization but that it would secure a bond which would guarantee the entire refund of all money spent were the mosquitoes not completely destroyed within a stipulated time. And then he told them that, if the summer people and the natives would lend their moral and financial support, Mr. Storey was willing to sign the contract to begin work this year. The price of freedom from the pests, he told them, was \$12,000. The people responded, some money was collected, other was pledged, and the Gorgas Memorial entered into an agreement with Mr. Storey -- not the town of Cranberry Isles -- to clean up all the many mosquito breeding places on the Cranberry Isles and all adjacent places affecting the islands.

And that was some undertaking, for the breeding places on Great Cranberry, Little Cranberry (Islesford), Sutton and Baker's Islands -- the nucleus of the Cranberry Isles -- are almost too numerous to mention. And on Mt. Desert Island, between Sewall and McKinley back of Southwest Harbor, there is one of the worst breeding places east of the Lynn marshes. But Major Skinner, your correspondent at the mosquito front has learned, has been in combat with this winged army before and knows how to route them from whatever stronghold they may defend. He was formerly chief engineer of the Port of New York and was one of the first men to have enough courage to tell the skeeter to get away from Manhattan. He was the founder of the United States Drainage and Irrigation Company. When the Gorgas Memorial was formed he was called to head its now famous division of mosquito control and his work is known from Long Island and Jersey to the malaria belt near Cairo, Ill. He was recently called to the Brule river to make life easier for the fishing President.

Two Kinds of Skeeters

Out on the Cranberry Islands, that can be seen like deep green gems from this yacht-filled resort of wealth and society, Major Skinner is leading his army of ten Russians and eight Yankees into the bogs and marshes. Behind them they are leaving a criss-cross of trenches that would remind a veteran of his old home in Flanders Fields. The reason for this lies in the fact that the only way to eradicate mosquitos is to drain and drain and keep on draining. Where the water runs freely the mosquito runs for freedom.

On the islands, all of which are lowlying, there is a vast amount of swamp land and salt marsh area. The largest breeding place, where the forces of the *Aedes Solicitans* keep their long-range flyers in headquarters, is the marsh back of Southwest Harbor. This salt marsh covers between eight and nine hundred acres and is free of all drainage. Here in the breeding season, literally millions of large and very active, long-range mosquitos are born to wing their way across the waters to resting places on the islands and even as far away as Bar Harbor. The workers have left this area to the last, but it is one of the most important ones to be drained.

Great Cranberry Island came first. On this island there is a large swamp which for almost time immemorial has been such a bog that about the only live creatures able to venture on it have been the sea gulls who fly in great numbers to feast upon the berries which it grows. A road built of logs stretches across its eastern end but of late seasons this has been one mire of soft and oozy mud. The "haith," as it is known locally, is nearly a mile in length. Now a long trench stretches the long way and other transverse ditches help to drain it. Here in this bog Major Skinner's own invention was called into play. This is an especially constructed implement that cuts through roots and turf with the precision of a razor blade swiping through a sheet of paper. To date, the major says, this excavation tool has cut through 89,000,000 linear feet of ditch (not all on the Cranberry Islands, of course)!

A dozen or so other swamps and salt marsh areas dot the island. These, too, have been drained with lateral and transverse ditches. In all instances the trenches lead to the sea. On one ditchside your correspondent stood and watched literally thousands of larvae mosquitos being carried on a miniature torrent from a salt marsh down to the broad sweeps of the Atlantic Ocean. Most of these ditches have their outlet through rough beaches where the continual wash of the waves rolling in and out leave the beaches different in contour year by year. Deep down into these beaches of rock and gravel and sand wooden outlets have been sunk. In some instances the depth has been from six to twelve feet. The outlets have been constructed of heavy timbers rather than of iron or clay pipes because wood alone can withstand the constant buffeting of heavy rocks tossed hither and yon by a sea that is often in an angry mood. Iron would break, clay would crumble, wood alone can stand the strain.

Pond Point Now Pondless

On Great Cranberry there is a point of ground known locally for years as Pond Point. In this area are (or rather, were) Birlem's pond and the so-called Salt Lakes. Scientific drainage has entirely dissipated Birlem's pond and when the huge twelve-foot drain through a dishearteningly rocky beach has been completely cut the Salt Lakes will have been drained slowly into the sea. This region, although once inhabited, within the last decade has been visited only by foolhardy picnic parties and desperate berrypickers. During the war a seventy-foot whale beached there and, after futile efforts of tug boats, dynamite and fire, was left there to disintegrate in the sun, much to the discomfiture of the people who might get to its leeward side anywhere within a radius of seven miles!

Today, with the work only half done, one can walk dry shod across the corduroy road, a feat impossible even last summer. And one need carry no switch to drive off the pests. Today one could sit neath a tree on Pond Point with a book to read it in comfort, although during the war it was urged by one patriotic soul, now dead, that were the Kaiser captured alive he be stripped naked and chained on the point to be eaten alive by the mosquitos. People familiar with the Point said he would last two days only!

Near Green Spot and Long Point other treacherous bogs have been drained. Islesford, as Little Cranberry rather vainly calls itself, is fast being dried up. Sutton, the aristocrat of the small archipelago, is quickly becoming a pestless place. Ting [tiny?] Baker's, with its lighthouse, has felt the thud of pickaxes and the ring of shovels and soon Aunt Phoebe, who has lived there lo, these countless years, will soon know what it is to live in an island paradise. This year, of course, the islands all still have their crop of biting pests but that is only because it was impossible to complete drainage before the first broods had been born by the thousands, as the active warfare did not commence until the middle of June. The drainage should be through by the middle of September.

Major Skinner Speaks

Next spring Major Skinner and his "clean up" squad will visit this theater of war to see that there is no guerilla fighting amongst the enemy which he is so successfully routing this summer. One man, a native of the islands, will be left in charge to see that the ditches and drains are always in good working condition, as one of the most important factors is to be sure that "the system" is kept in perfect working order until that day comes when the possibility of the birth of a single mosquito on the Cranberry Islands is as rare as a rainless day in June.

Major Skinner has settled mosquitoes in every campaign against this pestiferous enemy fought successfully on American soil. And this is what he told your correspondent in the first-line trenches: "The Cranberry Islands contain the most prolific mosquito breeding, in proportion to their area, of any section in the Eastern States. This is primarily due to the fact that the ocean has thrown up great stone and sand sea walls. Through these the perigree tides seep or overflow the boundaries, thus leaving pools and ponds of salt water that soon stagnate and breed millions of mosquitoes. One-sixth of all the area of the islands is (or has been!) swamp area.

"The 'skeeters' which breed on this stagnant water find ideal harboring places in the wooded territory that covers four-fifths of the entire islands. The low-lying natural swamp areas furnish the most desirable of mosquito food. Our work, then, is to take away all this surface water on which the pests breed, by establishing drains in such a way that it will flow forever out to sea. When all this surface water is gone, there can be no more mosquitoes. The drainage outlets are so constructed that water can flow outward only and no sea water can seep back into the ponds or marshes."

The War Goes On

And so the daily battles go on. Major Skinner leads his allied forces against the foe, confident of a complete victory. Some of the native population is skeptical of results. Others, led by such whole-hearted citizens as Mr. and Mrs. John Hamor and Millard Spurling, have done fine work to help Mr. Storey in the war of which he is the prime mover. Summer residents of the islands and nearby harbors, the Cranberry Club, and other

organizations have helped considerably. The Cranberry Islands, without knowing it, may be in for a "boom" as the only mosquitoless place in Maine. Meanwhile the war goes on and the trenches increase daily.