

WAR AGAINST MALARIA IN SIERRA LEONE

R.A.F. HELP WITH AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS

Aerial photographs taken by the R.A.F. have played a part in the campaign which has been in progress for some time against malaria in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Freetown has never been a healthy town (Sierra Leone was once known as the white man's grave) but it was not until early in the war, when the harbour was transformed into a busy shipping centre, that the problem was presented in acute form. It then became apparent that fresh sources of infection from malaria were proving a menace to seamen using the port.

Action was at once taken to combat this menace and an expert Commission was appointed by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to study the matter on the spot. The members of the Commission, Professor D.B. Blacklock, Professor of Tropical Hygiene at Liverpool University, and Dr. Carmichael Wilson, a senior member of the Colonial Medical Service, spent a year at Freetown.

Meanwhile, an active part was being played by the Ministry of War Transport, and an intensive propaganda campaign on anti-malarial measures was conducted among visiting seamen. An elaborate "report" system was introduced so that a check could be kept on the health of all shipping personnel who had passed through the port. Crews were forbidden to go ashore at night and every effort was made to prevent mosquitoes getting aboard ships, which were also sprayed regularly with insecticides.

Simultaneously, the recommendations of the Blacklock Commission were being carried out, and in addition to temporary measures, a great deal of permanent drainage and other means of mosquito control were undertaken in co-operation with the Service authorities. The regular spraying of native houses had been in operation for some time and staffs were increased to obtain a better sanitary control of town and village areas generally.

Long term measures include the preparation by an experienced irrigation engineer of plans for the permanent drainage of the Freetown area. These plans envisage permanent anti-malarial control at Freetown in the light of present day knowledge.

Thus investigations over a period of twelve months by another expert, Dr. Muirhead Thomson, have shown that the breeding of malarial infected mosquitoes in the vast harbour of Freetown is confined to "orchards" of a certain type of mangrove. Aerial photographs of the mangrove areas were taken by the R.A.F. and will be used in an offensive aimed at the elimination of these "orchards".

In order to co-ordinate anti-malarial measures and to ensure that experience gained at Freetown is available throughout other areas, Dr. Carmichael Wilson pays regular visits to West African ports. In addition, three former ships' masters are to go to West African ports to instruct visiting seamen on anti-malarial measures.

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