

BRITAIN'S FOOD RESERVES

Population Eats More In Wartime

IN a recent broadcast Mr. Winston Churchill hinted that Britain was prepared for a war which, by 1942, would take a new trend. Food supplies for such a vast population, swelled by many refugees and overseas soldiers, make one of the major problems of the Homeland at this time.

Here are some facts about Britain's food reserves, written by the Right Hon. J. R. Clynes, who was Food Controller during the last war.

Britain can face rationing this time with confidence. Wise action taken by the authorities during last August and September ensured that hardly a grain of corn or a potato of last summer's crop was wasted. We did not reach that stage of efficiency last time until 1916.

We have in Britain enough corn, flour and potatoes to ensure that supplies will be unrestricted and prices normal in these basic foods for the coming twelve months. To make assurance doubly sure, Allied food commissions abroad have purchased big reserves.

Other bodies have arranged with the Argentine, New Zealand, and Australian meat markets to earmark huge quantities of meat for Britain. It is an interesting fact, which I first discovered when I was at the Food Ministry myself, that a country at war eats considerably more than the same land at peace.

Reserves Are Growing Bigger

Reasons may be that millions of men lead an active, outdoor life, and men and women at home are transferred from lighter to heavy industries to meet war needs. Anyway, the Food Ministry has to get more food imported in war time, despite shipping losses and the transference of a large shipping tonnage to serve naval and military requirements.

As far as meat goes, we are at present well supplied. We have more meat in Britain to-day than we should have had if the world had been at peace. And ample reserves are on their way, or are growing bigger on the South American pampas or the Australian ranches.

Fats are not so easy to supply. In peace time Britain eats over 500,000 tons of butter per year. Most of it came from Denmark, New Zealand and Australia. The two latter countries are so far away that running butter from them is, in wartime, likely to be costly in ships. Until Denmark was invaded the Germans had made a formidable concerted attack on Danish butter ships and sunk many of them. Pressure had been put on Denmark to divert her butter to Germany, threats and cajoleries both being used.

200,000 Tons of Butter

Still, despite the loss of Danish supplies we have in Britain nearly 200,000 tons of butter in store; rationing is more to ensure equal distribution, and one fair amount for poor and rich alike, than because supplies are short.

The Germans are getting 30zs. of "fats" per head per week; butter

vanished completely long ago; margarine is far rarer than butter here—the 30zs. consists mostly of "ersatz" of an oily consistency, including mixed dripping, lard and other fats.

Bacon is not too plentiful in Britain, largely because Denmark, our chief supplier, has now been subjugated.

The British pig industry has been greatly increased, however, and we are getting bacon from other sources; there will be no real shortage.

Six months' supplies of tea were seized by the Government when war broke out. Stocks were taken from normal store-houses and distributed hastily all over the country. Some were loaded into open barges, where rain ruined them. Others got damp lying in open docks.

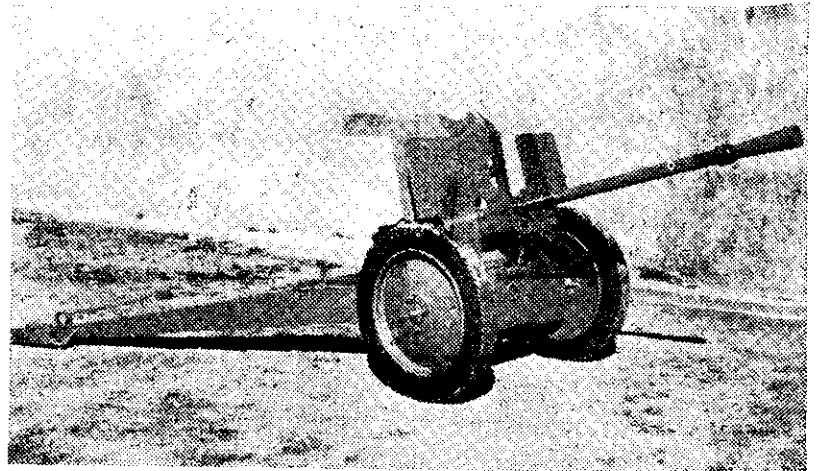
It is easy to criticise the muddle that resulted. But precautions were taken in case of immediate intensive air raiding. Had such raiding occurred we should still have got our food. If the instant decentralisation of millions of tons of food had not been carried out then raiding might have starved us into defeat before Christmas.

The fact that such decentralisation was carried out may have largely contributed to Hitler's decision not to bomb our cities. Though much tea was spoiled in moving, our supplies are so large that there is not the least need to carry out rationing, until recently.

Inexhaustible Supplies

Sugar has been rationed, but we have very big sugar reserves here, more growing in Britain, and inexhaustible supplies available from year to year in our own Colonies. Rationing has been decided upon because sugar is a heavy cargo to carry, and we may need the ships for other purposes.

Coal and petrol, as important as food to us, are both available in enormous quantities in Britain, but are being kept in reserve. We have bigger supplies of domestic coal here than for many years; and more petrol, though it is being kept for aircraft use.



REPLICA of an anti-tank gun for infantry detachments, manufactured at the Wellington Technical College for training units at Trentham Camp

I have seen it stated that beer rationing is possible. Because of a shortage of maize stocks farmers may be forced to feed barley to cattle during the winter, which would mean a call on the brewers' reserves.

Feeding 40,000,000 People

The same situation arose during the last war and, as Food Controller, I opposed the rationing of beer, although at that time bread production, and the import and sale of flour, were most stringently controlled.

I knew that men engaged in heavy war industries needed beer as a food, and I spoke strongly in the House to this effect. Following a last and successful speech, one of my friends said to me:

"We don't mind you defending Government policy, but you seem to defend beer with such tremendous wholeheartedness! You sound as if you enjoy every word!"

Beer was not rationed then, and I do not think it will be this time.

While I was at the Food Ministry there were occasions when the problems of feeding 40,000,000 people were almost too much for me. They killed my predecessor, Lord Rhondda.

Our convoy system was not organised then as it is now, and sometimes we lost as much as 130,000 tons of shipping in a week. One week, I remember, the clerk who kept me informed of such losses had to inform me of the sinking of sixty food ships.

Bread riots brought Russia to her knees and forced her to make a separate peace. Bread riots defeated Germany in the end. We never had bread riots here, but several times I had to put before the War Cabinet figures which they dreaded as much as the report of a great defeat in France.

No Crisis This Time

Thrice we were on the very edge of a meat famine. Once, a bread famine was averted only by the mercy of Providence.

I do not think there will be crises like those in this war. We have begun it too well, and organised everything too swiftly. Not until 1917 was there any proper organisation of food last time, and nothing was effectively rationed till early in 1918.

Even fish is plentiful again here. It was short for a time, because of the transference of numbers of trawlers to the essential work of mine sweeping and submarine patrol, but now the markets are fairly full again, and will be fuller. Our shipbuilding programme is enormous and should make the whole food situation improve even from its present satisfactory state.

In Germany, almost everything is already rationed — all foods, clothing, boots, paper, light, heat—and rationed on a basis which often does not supply sufficient for healthy needs. But here our shops are full, and rations are ample of the two or three foods so far restricted.

We have splendid reserves, and the whole business of rationing has been put on a logical and sound footing.

Britain surmounted the difficulties of the winter months with quiet confidence. Beyond that, no matter how long the war may last, it is probable that we shall never be as short of necessities here as Germany is at this moment.

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