

Gopher Killing Successful On Black Canyon Project With Gas

BOISE, Sept. 13(Special)—A labor-saving method of killing gophers on federal reclamation projects, on which rodents can cause thousands of dollars in damages through canal breaks, has won for William Adam Batzner, camp-man at the bureau of reclamation's office in Notus, a \$25 award from the department of interior's incentive awards committee.

The process, involving forcing poison gas under compressed air into gopher runs, is described in the September issue of "The Reclamation Era", official bureau of reclamation monthly magazine. Annual savings on 53,000 acres of the Black Canyon unit of the Boise project are estimated at \$500.

The article points out that generally, when someone thinks of some better way to do a job, it's either the result of a desire to make the job easier, to make it safer or to make more money.

But in the case of William Batzner, it was intense hatred.

"I hate gophers!" said the 55-year-old camp-man, gritting his teeth in disgust. He so despises them that in the fall of 1949, after trapping them for several years on the canal banks of the Payette division of the Boise project, he perfected a new, modernized method of killing the pest. His ingenuity has resulted in a sizable reduction in the cost of performing this annual maintenance operation.

The new land area, which is Batzner's battleground, embraces 53,000 acres of irrigable land. It is plag-

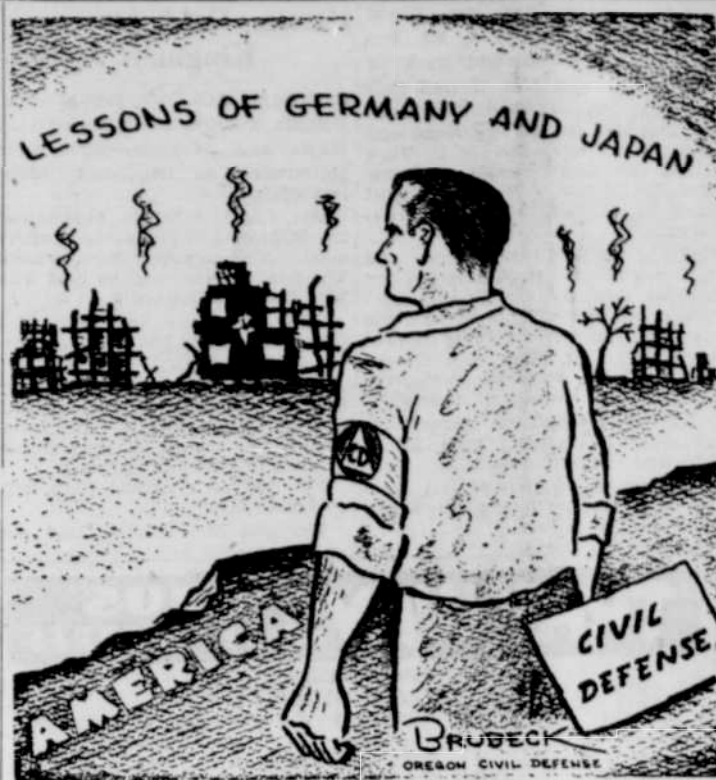
ued, as most irrigation projects, by thousands of gophers, which burrow through canal banks and would, if allowed to dig away unmolested, cause costly and perhaps disastrous canal breaks. An old gopher may dig as much as a mile of tunnel in a year.

Up until about 1½ years ago, Batzner, who was then "official gopher-catcher" on the division, used traps. An expert at the business, he killed as many as 1,330 during one 90-day period. But the process of covering the 500 miles of canals on the division was burdensome, time-consuming, costly, and required handling the pests, which is not exactly a pleasant experience, even for Batzner, who had trapped some 5,000 or more.

Despite his outstanding record, Batzner wasn't satisfied with his yearly kill. He so detested the rodents that he lay awake nights thinking of how to kill them faster. Today, because of that meditation, the job is being done faster, cheaper and cleaner.

The new method employs calcium cyanide powder. These fine particles are blown, under compressed air, into the network of gopher runs, where upon exposure to the moisture in the tunnels, they release hydrocyanic acid, which kills life instantly.

Batzner took an ideal compressor from the warehouse at Notus, which had been used to pump up automobile and carry-all tires, and placed it on a jeep. He fastened about 50 feet of quarter-inch rubber hose



to the compressor and at the end of the hose attached an improvised metal chamber to hold the cyanide powder and stir it up through the application of air.

The chamber, which was made in about two hours, consists of a 6-inch length of 3-inch pipe, welded shut at one end and provided with a screw-cap at the other. Inside this chamber is a quarter-inch valve, which controls the amount of compressed air that may enter and thus regulates the amount of powder that leaves the chamber each time air is admitted. In front of the valve is a jet, which mixes the air with the powder, and behind the valve is a small hole through which the air and powder are blown out through the hose and into the gopher run.

Until Batzner perfected the compressed air device, cyanide gas had been inserted into the runways by means of a hand-pump. This system was only partially successful. The gopher felt the change in pres-

sure of the air each time the pump stem came down and hurriedly threw up an earth bulkhead to protect himself from whatever he felt was coming after him.

The compressed air blows the killing fumes through the runs as fast as 150 feet in 1½ minutes. In one demonstration, gas was inserted in one gopher hill and in 20 seconds it came out from another hill, opened up for the demonstration, some 60 feet away.

The monetary savings resulting from the improved killing method are easily discernible. Trapping normally required about 60 working days, at a cost of \$3.50 per day, or \$150 each season. About 60 traps were used, but two-thirds of them were lost during the annual operation. Cats and dogs would carry off gophers and traps, or human beings would steal them. This loss amounted to \$32. About 50 miles of driving per day was required at a cost of 10 cents per mile, or a total

of \$300. The entire operation cost \$342 per year.

Compared with the present system, a two-man crew can do the job in 10 days at a labor cost of \$160. The automobile expense, estimated at 70 miles per day, totals \$70. Fifty pounds of calcium cyanide costs \$25, making a total cost of \$245 per year. Thus, the savings amount to more than \$500 a year. Use of the Batzner-perfected method on projects throughout the west would greatly multiply this figure, of course.

Local News

Here From Long Beach—

Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Bartz of Long Beach visited Friday in Nyssa at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Ben Storm.

Here On Business—

Mr. and Mrs. Warren Lowe of Caldwell spent several days in Nyssa the past week on business. Mr. Lowe is considering opening a repair shop for washers and other machines here.

Eagles Auxiliary To Meet—

The Eagles Ladies auxiliary will meet September 18 at 8 o'clock in the Eagles hall. The meeting will be the annual auxiliary birthday party. Charter members will be especially honored.

Receives Word From Son—

Mr. and Mrs. Scott Hiatt received word from their son, Opl. Willis Hiatt that his time to serve with the U. S. army has been extended for another year. Due to the time he spent in Korea he is due for a rotation from the far east next May.

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