The Battle of Oil
BY HAROLD L. ICKES

SO FAR as my information goes, this war has not been officially christened. The last report was that the search was on for a name that would at the same time identify the war and forever remind us that it must never be permitted to happen again. The person who submits the suggestion that is generally accepted may get his name in the newspapers or even in the history books.

One thing that we do know is that several wars within the war are raging daily and that these "second fronts" are already pretty well named for posterity. There are the Battle of Production, the Battle of Rubber, the Battle of Oil, and many others.

Yes, the Battle of Oil, with which I am principally familiar, is a war within the war, and it is one of major importance. The Battle of Production is being won, but the Battle of Oil, as well as the Battle of Rubber, is still in the fluid stage, with pincer movements and attempted encirclements of daily occurrence. As this is written, the Nazis are pushing on toward the Caucasus oil fields; should they reach them and put them to work, Russia's mechanized strength would be crippled and the Nazis' own prospects greatly improved. It would be a telling blow to all the United Nations.

In our own case, the fight is of another but nevertheless a desperate sort. With us it has not been a question of supply. We still lead the world in production, although the rest of the world has much more oil in reserve than we have. This I have tried by every conceivable means to make clear. With us the question is how to get petroleum products from where they are to where they are needed. When I was appointed Petroleum Coordinator toward the end of May, 1941, the situation had become serious, chiefly by reason of the necessary diversion of oil tankers to Britain.

The first effects of these diversions were felt in our reserve centers. The direct effect on the individual, perhaps unfortunately for the country, was not immediately noticeable. The daily supply of petroleum was apparently as plentiful as ever. I can understand, therefore, why the average motorist refused to let himself get excited when he was told that a shortage was just around the pump, all set to stick its tongue out at him if he didn't economize in his driving. But I shall never be able to understand, nor shall I be quick to forgive, the newspapers that told the motorist to travel as usual, on the wholly untenable ground that our petroleum supplies were the most plentiful in the world, and without end. This never has been true of our reserves, though we have made more oil available to consumers than the rest of the world.

Had we been given the cooperation then that we are getting now—although even now there are mole-like exceptions—the oil crisis of today might have been deferred, and in the interlude we might have spared the inconvenience and annoyance of rationing. Also the contribution to victory would have been worth while.

The danger of exhausting our reserve supplies in above-ground storage was what practical oil men fore-saw first, and acting upon their expert advice, the Office of the Petroleum Coordinator tried valiantly, though in vain, to lessen consumption. We couldn't, with prudence, permit this above-ground storage to get too low, and it was clear that only by using less could we prevent an over-drain upon our storage tanks. With daily movements from the oil fields seriously interfered with by reduced shipments over the water routes, it became necessary to make up the difference out of the reserves if the daily demand of individuals was to be satisfied. But if reserves are drawn down day after day and week after week, there will come a time when there won't be any reserves, and then, with a scarcity of transportation, will come confusion and a serious curtailment that, like rain, will fall upon just and unjust users alike.

Meanwhile reserves in the Atlantic States kept falling lower and lower. From a high of 82,000,000 barrels on December 1 they fell to a low of 46,488,000 barrels on April 11. Since then we have not given out the figures for military reasons, but citizens may rest assured that the situation did not suddenly and drastically improve. Some relief was felt when railroad tank-car movements increased and a few of the borrowed tankers were returned to us by England, whereupon the newspapers, with the motorists echoing them, labeled it "Ickes' phony oil shortage" and filed the whole thing away under "finished business." But the relief was purely ephemeral. Individuals continued to burn as much as they-ever did, although less regular gasoline was being produced in order that we might produce more aviation and industrial fuels. The problem of how to transport enough heating oil to keep everybody warm next winter then began to show its ugly head. On top of all else, it was clearly demonstrated by the continued decline in reserves that the railroads' boasted best was not nearly good enough. Then, and not until then, was belated but nevertheless welcome consideration given to additional pipeline transportation.
The Ickes pipe dream, better known to the trade as the "Ickes pipe line," has begun to come true. The first of the new lines now under record-speed construction between Texas and Illinois will be opened for business, we hope, some time within the next four months, and when the flow starts it should alleviate, although it will not overcome, the scarcity of heating oil in the Atlantic States. In addition, old lines are being relaid to carry more oil east. I have just seen the first of the new giant tubes "come off the line" at Lorain, Ohio.

The inevitable rationing was sneaking up on the people while they stubbornly refused to envisage the danger, and for their obscurationist I hold the newspapers almost entirely responsible. They may disclaim it loudly or hide in the tombs of silence, but the fact is clear that the shortage was intensified and accelerated by the editors who refused to apply their reasoning powers to a problem that their eyes couldn't actually see. "Intellectuals" all!

I wish that I might feel sure that, with continued and increased railroad tank-car shipments, which have pretty nearly reached their capacity, with an increased movement of oil by means of new and relaid pipe lines, with added barges, we could overcome fully the loss of tankers resulting from diversions and submarine sinkings. I do not consider it wise to count upon tanker transportation of petroleum to our East Coast states. We are hoping that this may be resumed, but we can't be sure, and so we do not add to our figures what might possibly accrue to our supplies from this source.

Washington officials have been freely and, I may say, often unfairly set upon for the manner in which gasoline rationing was imposed in the first instance. I do not offer it as an excuse, but it should be obvious to any fair-minded person that the job of distributing millions of barrels of petroleum products to 33,000,000 motorists, not to mention millions of truck owners, of meeting the demands of the government in the prosecution of the war, and at the same time of keeping our home fires burning is no mean one. Moreover, it was not a job for which we had ever had a precedent or previous training. Add to all this the outcropping of abuse by newspapers, some of which I sometimes think would not be overwhelmed by a complete breakdown of our war effort, and the resulting situation was by no stretch of the imagination a simple one. A serious rubber shortage has made the gasoline situation still more complex.

For all its many troublesome angles, the problem will be well on the way to a satisfactory resolution just as soon as the car owners of the nation get down to the job of beating it, and the car owners will get down to this job just as soon as they realize the full extent of their responsibility. At this juncture, the newspapers have their chance to make amends for their lack of foresight and their bullyragging tactics of a year ago.

Who Is the State Department?

II. THE OLD WELLES AND THE NEW

BY ROBERT BENDINER

To critics of the snobbish caste traditions of the State Department, Sumner Welles seems to offer a perfect target. In temperament, which is austere and formal, if not downright chilling; in background, which is wealthy and aristocratic; in sartorial appearance, which is fastidious and soberly elegant; and in political philosophy as well, he is at opposite poles from his chief. The feuding Tennessee frontier of Hull's boyhood is replaced by the stuffy affluence of the home of a successful financier in the New York of the nineties; a financier of lineage as well as wealth, a member of that same New York aristocracy that produced the Roosevelts. The Welleses and the Roosevelts, in fact, crossed paths long before Franklin D. appointed Sumner to his little cabinet. Eleanor Roosevelt and Sumner Welles shared the same godmother, and as a boy of thirteen Welles served as a page at the future President's wedding. The tie assumes some importance, by no means decisive, in explaining the President's loyalty to the subordinate who has borne the brunt of the criticism directed against the State Department.

Groton and Harvard were inevitable for young Welles. He appears to have gone through school with characteristic sobriety and aloofness. A snob perhaps but never a playboy, Welles seems always to have been mature beyond his years. He determined while at school to prepare for the Foreign Service, worked hard at languages and economics, and, with the best of connections, found no difficulty in being admitted. From the start he was convinced that Latin America would be supremely important in the years to come, and while other budding diplomats asked, futilely enough, to be sent to Paris or to London, he requested a South American capital for his first assignment. The department sent him to Tokyo instead, where he worked up a thoroughlygoing dislike for the Japanese, but after two years it relented.