

I cannot resist giving one more example of Steinhaus' quick mathematical intelligence. It has to do with his estimate of the casualties of the German army in 1944, and it should be borne in mind that he was then in hiding and completely cut off from any source of reliable news.

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HUGO STEINHAUS — A REMINISCENCE AND A TRIBUTE

579

He noticed that some of the obituaries of German soldiers which were published in the rigidly controlled local newssheet mentioned that the dead was the second or even third member of his family to have fallen in the war, and this was information enough!

For by dividing the percentage of obituaries of second, third, etc. sons by the (conditional) probability that a family with at least one son will have more than one, an estimate of casualty percentage can be obtained. Disregarding the age factor (some sons may be too young to be drafted), all one needs is the average number of sons in a family (easily estimable) and the knowledge that the number of sons obeys the Poisson distribution.