

THE MEN OF TIMOR.

In the mass of Islands which stud the Pacific North of Australia lies Timor. Out of this Mystery Island comes a story to add to the saga of guerrilla warfare. A handful of Australians who had taken to the hills, and for over a year harassed the Japanese in combat. Their staple diet was water buffalo and crocodile meat. For weeks on end no white men knew of their existence.

They lived among the friendly natives and had one luxury - an improvised shower bath. Although outnumbered by a hundred to one, they fought the Japanese. In two months they had killed more than 600 for the loss of 17 of their number. Native bush telegraph falsely told them that Australia itself had fallen; but they never gave in. They made their own warfare - fight, hit and run, kill all they can and then retire - the true guerrillas.

How these men made contact with civilization is one of the epics of this war. With a few odds and ends they began to build a radio transmitter. They scavenged for everything, going times and again through the enemy lines to do it. For the main components they made a night raid on a town, shut up the Japs and took a generator from a car. They melted solder out of old gear and caught it in bamboo cups. After many heartbreaking failures, they got a signal through to Darwin. When they hear Darwin order all stations off the air to prevent interference, these lost men get the kind of thrill that comes to few men.

It was a thrill also for the mainland listening post, but their first message was received with excitement tempered with suspicion. They were all believed dead or captured. It could easily be a Jap trick, a ruse to lead a resisting force into an ambush. So Darwin signal officers took precautions. Many of the Timor men were known to them intimately and back went the message: "To prove your identity, give christian name of Jack Sergeant's wife answer immediately". Here was the test.

From the bush radio transmitter came the answer. Over the ether flashed the one word which was to bring them help, food, clothes, ammunition, and the abatement of the whole Australian Army.

And so supplies came; removing the threat of death which hung over the marooned men of Timor. Letters too - voices from home talking to them in the Wilderness.

And Australian money, not as pay for them because there was nothing they could do with it, but as pay for the natives who appreciate the silver currency.

In their jungle hide-out the men of "Sparrow Force" (as they became known) planned their raids. The natives in this area were friendly and willing allies, but the Japs had armed many of her tribes and incited them to attack the Australians and their supporting tribesmen. They had begun a civil war. Only a comparatively small patrol of Aussies could be spared for the job. They would take care of the Japs while the natives would deal with their perfidious countrymen. Primitive warfare inspired and goaded by men who had gone back to the primitive in this Island battlefield. Varily the attackers closed in on the Jap positions. The honourable sons of Nippon received another rude awakening. With wild cries and brandishing flaming spears and fire sticks, the band of warriors descended on the village to fight their share of the battle their way.

These little skirmishes frequently released a tide of unfortunates, livestock and men in strange mixture. A springling of old women near to death, and children just beginning life. Young girls, old men, a pitiable band.

For meritorious service, five outstanding N.C.O's are praised by their Company Commander, Captain Jeff Laidlaw, famous New South Wales athlete and Surf Swimmer. Because of his giant proportions Laidlaw is known to his men as "The Bull". When asked about Japanese fanaticism the Bull replied :- "I haven't seen such fanatical dying, but I've seen some bloody fanatical running".

These are some of the men who fought a private war on an Island which knew Captain Bligh's adventures following the "Mutiny on the Bounty".

The men of Timor, by courageous bravery, have written a page in Australian history without equal.