

Japanese Beheaded Australian Airman

CANBERRA, Monday.—Included in the grim factual details in Sir William Webb's report on Japanese atrocities is the remarkable story of the ceremonial decapitation of a captured Australian airman.

The evidence of this crime was provided by one of the Japanese onlookers, whose diary subsequently fell into Allied hands.

The Japanese diarist described how his commander decided that one of two R.A.A.F. flyers taken from an aircraft shot down by ack-ack fire "should be killed in accordance with the compassionate sentiment of Japanese bushido."

The diary detailed the event: "Now the time has come and the prisoner is made to kneel on the bank of a bomb crater filled with water. He is surrounded with guards with fixed bayonets, but he remains calm. He even stretches his neck, and is very brave," the diarist wrote.

"The commander has drawn his favourite sword. It glitters in the light, and sends cold shivers down my spine. He taps the prisoner's neck lightly with the back of the blade. Then he raises it above his head with both arms and brings it down with a sweep. I have been standing with muscles tensed, but at that moment I close my eyes.

"It must be the sound of blood spurting from the arteries. With the sound, as if something watery is being cut, the body falls forward. It is amazing. He has been killed with one stroke.

"Onlookers crowd forward. The head detached from the trunk rolls in front of him. Dark blood gushes out.

"All is over, and the savageness I felt is gone. I feel nothing, but the true compassion of Japanese bushido.

"A superior seaman of a medical unit takes the Chief Medical

Officer's sword and, intent on paying off old scores, turns the headless body over on its back and cuts the abdomen open with one clean stroke.

"They are thick skinned, these hairy foreigners. Even the skin of the belly is thick. Not a drop of blood comes out of the body, which is pushed over into the crater at once and buried."

Sir William Webb said he was satisfied this was a genuine account, and recorded an actual occurrence. Evidence was given later that the decapitated body of an Australian airman was disinterred from a bomb crater at Kela point, Salamaua, which was the place mentioned in the diary as the place of the execution.

Sir William Webb said it could be reasonably concluded the captured Australian soldiers were tied up, pressed for military information, tortured and then, in some cases, used for bayonet practice and finally killed.

Although the Milne Bay campaign lasted only from August 26 to September 6, 1942, no tied up soldier was found alive. Even if not fed the men who were merely tied to trees to secure them as prisoners would have survived the tormenting.

A frightful massacre of Australian soldiers followed the fall of Rabaul to the Japanese on January 23, 1942. Sir William reported.

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A small force of Australians threatened with encirclement withdrew to the south, where finally they were trapped by the Japanese and captured near the Tol Plantation.

After they had been stripped of identity discs, and Red Cross brassards torn from the arms of medical personnel, the men had their hands tied with fishing cord.

They were marched in parties of 10 or 12 into the jungle, where they were then bayoneted or shot in the presence of others awaiting their turn, and who actually saw the killings, or heard the screams as the bayonets were driven home.

Only two of the Australians escaped. One civilian cut his bonds by rubbing them against a stone and then untied the bonds of another. This civilian died later in New Britain.

A Japanese motioned one of the victims to go into the jungle, where he was bayoneted. The others heard his screams, then the Japanese soldier emerged from the jungle wiping blood from his bayonet with a cloth.

An Australian next in the line broke loose and tried to escape, but was cut down with a sword by a Japanese officer, who then shot him in the head with a pistol.

Two victims who were badly bayoneted in the stomach succeeded in reaching a hut, but some days afterwards they were found by the Japanese, who set fire to the hut and burnt them to death.

One soldier, while still tied to other Australians, and with thumbs tied behind, was stabbed in the middle of the back. Those tied to him were also stabbed about the same time.

A Japanese standing over him when he fell stabbed him another six times in the back.

He was walking away, when the soldier, who had been holding his breath, could do so no longer. The Japanese turned and stabbed him another four times, once through the ear. The point of the bayonet

another four times, once through the ear. The point of the bayonet came out through the soldier's mouth, after severing the temple artery. Blood gushed from his mouth.

The Japanese pulled leaves over him and other Australians, and left the soldier for dead. Eventually he got up and managed to reach a beach about 30 yards away, where he bathed himself in the sea. Finally he met other Australians.

At Waitavalo plantation a party of 11, after their discs and other possessions had been taken and their names had been written down, had their wrists tied behind them.

They were marched into a plantation and shot from behind with rifles and machine guns. Six of those left for dead recovered and escaped.

Sir William said it was impossible to say how many Australians were killed in the Tol and Waitavalo massacres, but the number was not far short of 150.

In a great number of cases Australian and American dead were mutilated with swords, knives and other sharp instruments.

In many cases the flesh was removed and sometimes found in Japanese mess kits and over fires.

Any doubt about the Japanese troops being guilty of cannibalism was removed by the admission of at least three prisoners of war that the Japanese soldiers ate flesh from their own and Australian and American dead.

Authentic enemy sources revealed that in 1942, during the Japanese retreat, some of them ate Australian soldiers.

Not only were the Japanese cutting up their own dead and putting the flesh in the dixies, but they actually admitted they were eating their compatriots.

"It was noteworthy that the majority of the Japanese soldiers who were left without food preferred to starve rather than resort to cannibalism," Sir William commented.

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ALTHOUGH NO AUSTRALIAN OR AMERICAN survived to give evidence of the Milne Bay atrocities, there were plenty of witnesses of the horrible barbarity in other parts of New Guinea.

An Australian was tied to a stump with his legs knotted around it. The legs of an American were knotted around a stump and his head left hanging down in a swamp. Many Australians were tied to trees and bayoneted.

In February, 1942, four Australians were tied up and shot by the Japanese on Timor.

Sir William proved many cases of the Japanese firing on and killing medical personnel, including stretcher bearers and wounded.

On December, 29, 1943, at Buna Mission 30 Japanese killed an American and an Australian officer after torturing them for two hours. The Japanese sat on the victims and ate rations stolen from them.

In a Buna coconut grove Japanese from 20 yards fired on and killed two stretcher bearers who were wearing Red Cross arm bands.

Sir William said other matters worthy of comment were :

- The Japanese failure to bury their own dead.
- Their failure to provide for abandoned sick and wounded.
- Their treachery and ill-treatment of natives.

He recommended a special inquiry into Japanese crimes against the natives to be conducted by experienced magistrates, who were the best judges of the credibility of these somewhat difficult witnesses.

“NO IMMUNITY” URGED

CANBERRA, Monday.—In his statement Dr. Evatt said the disclosures of Sir William Webb's report, combined with the Americans' findings on atrocities against the Americans, strengthened the

the Americans, strengthened the confirmed policy of the Australian Government that there should be no immunity from trial on war crimes for any Japanese whatsoever.

“Furthermore, the view of the Australian Government is that the general charge of planning and

Australian Government is that the general charge of planning and waging aggressive warfare shortly to be preferred against major German war criminals applies equally to those in Japan," Dr. Evatt added.

He said Australia endorsed the

recommendations of the War Crimes Commission for the apprehension and trial of suspected Japanese without delay.

These recommendations, if carried out, would ensure punishment of all culpable persons in the Japanese administration and armed forces. If properly applied they would ensure that no Japanese who deserved punishment would escape.

In the meantime Australia was taking action to ascertain the facts from all territories in which the enemy had been in contact with the Australians since 1941.

This would involve taking evidence from Australian P.O.W. For this purpose the Government had nominated two additional judges to assist Sir William Webb.

In its demand that all Japanese war criminals be brought to trial, the Government was actuated by no spirit of revenge, but by profound feeling of justice and responsibility to ensure that the next generation of Australians was spared these frightful experiences.

Sir William Webb's report revealed that Japanese war crimes—utterly wicked on the part of the cruel perpetrators—were part of a system of terrorism in which all Japanese troops and commanders participated.

"It is our duty to see that those who organised the system are punished, and that the system itself is completely eradicated," Dr. Evatt declared.

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