

Jap Admits Cannibalism After Australian Attack

From NOEL OTTAWAY, "Sun" Special Representative

WEWAK, Saturday.—First trial for cannibalism in the south-west Pacific area was held at Wewak yesterday.

Tall, thin, hatchet-faced First Lieut. Takehiko Tazaki pleaded not guilty to two charges before a special military court set up under the War Crimes Act.

The prosecuting officer (Captain Ray Steele, of Kew) alleged that on July 19 of this year Tazaki mutilated the dead body of a Queensland soldier at Soarin and on the following day ate portion of it.

Twenty-five officers and men of the battalion in which the dead Australian had fought were witnesses of the trial, which was remarkable for the fact that the chief evidence against the accused was his own signed statement to investigating officers.

Before this was made, the Australians knew nothing of the alleged crime, and the body of the dead Australian has not even yet been recovered.

With head shaven to the skin, and wearing Australian socks

with his Jap uniform, Corporal Eichi Yamamoto gave evidence that the Australian's body had been cut up and eaten by Lieut. Tazaki and Lance-Corporal Mena.

Yamamoto said that Tazaki had told him he had eaten the Australian, adding: "Man's flesh is delicious."

Tazaki flinched when Yamamoto, under instructions from the court, went over and placed his arm on his shoulder by way of identification.

Saw Body Cut Up

Under cross-examination by the defending officer (Captain J. Watson, of Randwick), Yamamoto admitted that he had not actually seen the body being cut up.

Tazaki at about that time was suffering from malaria, and the Jap rations consisted of a quarter of a litre of sago a day, and such roots as could be obtained in the jungle.

To illustrate the paucity of the ration, Yamamoto picked up the approximate bulk of the daily rations in sand from the court floor.

Lieut. K. J. Phillips said that on July 19 this year his platoon had attacked Japs in well-dug-in pits at Soarin No. 1 ridge. They met serious opposition, and were ordered to withdraw.

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When the platoon reassembled he was told a private had been killed.

On October 11, with a search party, he recovered the dead man's trousers, shirt and belt. The trousers had been cut down the inner seam and the shirt-sleeves and back ripped.

From a Jap prisoner he learned that Lieut. Tazaki was the commander who had opposed the attack.

Captain Douglas Bruce, investigating officer of the War Crimes Commission, submitted statements which, he said, Tazaki made and signed.

In these, it was stated, he had admitted eating the Australian, explaining that since he had been fighting them he had come

to hate the Australians.

In addition, he was hungry, and in the past had eaten various types of flesh, including flesh of snakes.

Speaking on his own behalf, Tazaki said that for a year he had lived without meat, and at least twice each month suffered attacks of malaria.

Sac-sac was the only regular food supply, and the amount was inadequate. All through July he had been weak from fever and had been continuously fired on by artillery. On July 19 his force was surprised by the Australians, and altogether 14 of his men were killed in two attacks. One Australian was shot.

"Wanted Strength"

His losses had made him extremely bitter against the Australians, and, with Lance-corporal Mena, he stripped the Australian of clothing and, after cutting off some of the flesh, ate it two hours later.

That evening he gave orders for the Australian's burial.

"I ate the flesh because I was very hungry and weak and wanted to bring back my strength so that I could live and carry on," Tazaki said.

"I never thought of eating human flesh before. I know that it was wrong, but at the time I did not have the strength to think whether it was good or bad. My mental condition was not normal."

Tazaki added that he had made full confession of the matter to the War Crimes Commission.

Defending officer Captain Watson claimed that Tazaki through privation and bombardment, was suffering from such a defect of reason that he was incapable of realising that his action was culpable.

The president adjourned the Court to consider its verdict.