

Jap. Lieut Faces Cannibalism War Charge

From a "Telegraph" Special Correspondent.

WEWAK: The first trial for cannibalism in the South-West Pacific Area was held at Wewak today.

In a sarsac roofed native hut, filled with the murmur of the sea, tall, thin, hatchet-faced First Lieutenant 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 Steel, 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 the witnesses.

The trial was remarkable in that the chief evidence against the accused was his own signed statement made to investigating officers.

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

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

He said that Tazaki had told him he had eaten the Australian, adding "man's flesh is delicious."

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

Tazaki about that time was suffering from malaria and the Japanese 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 the Japanese in well dug in pits at Soarin Number One Ridge.

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They met serious opposition and were ordered to withdraw. When the platoon re-assembled he was told a private had been killed.

RECOVERED CLOTHES

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

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

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

In those he had admitted having eaten 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 the flesh of snakes.

Accused's Statement

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.

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 and one Australian was shot.

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

That same 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.

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"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 a full confession of the matter to the War Crimes Commission.

The Defending Officer, Captain Watson, claimed at the conclusion of evidence 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 for a day, when a verdict will be given.