

IT'S TOUGH IN NEW GUINEA!

Australian War Correspondent Tells Us Why

THANKS to the films and romantic fiction, many people must have got the idea that a war correspondent's job is both enviable and glamorous. And it is, of course, a more exciting and eventful job than the average. But there is not much of the kind of thing that people usually mean when they talk about glamour if the test is the day-by-day experiences of a war correspondent in the Pacific. "The Listener" had the opportunity recently to interview Osmar White, who has spent several months in the battle area of New Guinea as correspondent for a group of Australian papers, and he gave us an account of what it is like to collect news and get it out of that "very tough country."

Here, selected from many others, are three facts which show the dangers and hardships involved: Of the 17 members of the Press hut at Port Moresby, four have now been killed, and five seriously wounded. In four and a-half months, White travelled more than 700 miles on foot, and more than 1,000 miles in small craft, such as canoes. Thirdly, to the Japanese, newspapermen are all spies!

But when we saw him, White looked none the worse for his experiences.

THE Pacific war, says Osmar White, is giving newsmen one of the toughest problems of reporting in this century. So primitive and remote are the areas in which many important phases of the campaign are being decided, that even "eye-witness" accounts do not suffice to build an accurate picture of what is really happening. The only way is to go in and see for oneself.

"Among recent exploits by Pacific war correspondents, the visit made by Bill Marien, Australian Broadcasting Commission correspondent, and Damien Parer, Department of Information newsreel photographer, to Japanese-occupied Timor, is the classic," he told us. "Marien and Parer, using an undisclosed means of transport, made contact with the Australian guerillas who are still harrying the Japanese garrisons on the island from their secret hill bases, and inflicting 50 casualties on the enemy for every man they themselves lose."

"The broadcaster and the newsreel man lived and fought with the commandos for many weeks and got back with some of the most remarkable documentary film and probably the most sensational and romantic story of the Pacific war."

Commandos in New Guinea

White himself was probably the first correspondent of any nationality to live and travel with a commando force. In June last he obtained permission from the Allied command at Port Moresby to organise an expedition to make contact with the Australian independent companies and scout corps operating in the savage mountains behind Lae and Salamaua. He was joined by Parer, then just returned from the Middle East, where he had filmed the first and second battles in the Western Desert, the Greek campaign, the Crete tragedy, and the British advance into Syria.

The two men set off with a retinue of native carriers to cross the island on foot from the south to the north coast, a journey that had been accomplished in peace-time by fewer than half a dozen white men. They chose a route that involved 160 miles of travel by lugger, an 80-miles journey by paddle canoe up an unexplored river, and a trek of nearly 200 miles through the west end of the Owen Stanley Range, where the peaks rise to 13,000 feet and the passes are at between 9,000 and 10,000 feet.

Salt for the Cannibals

This route—an ancient native hunting trail—led through the fringes of the notorious Baum country, where the savage little Kukukuku cannibals have



★ OSMAR WHITE (above) is a New Zealander though he has spent a good deal of his time in Australia. In recent months his name, attached to cable messages from New Guinea, has probably become familiar to many readers of our daily newspapers, and before the war he was chief of staff of the "Taranaki Daily News" and acting-editor of the "New Zealand Radio Record" for a period. In 1938 he was special writer for the "Sun Pictorial," Melbourne; he has contributed fiction to many English and American magazines; and he had previously travelled in the East, and the Netherlands East Indies and Pacific Islands.

He went to Port Moresby last January, representing an Australian morning newspaper group, the "Daily Express" (London), and American papers, and his accounts of the New Guinea campaign have also appeared in "Colliers Magazine." In New Guinea he experienced 70-odd air raids; crossed the Owen Stanleys on foot four times, did operational flights with the Air Force, and paid visits to North Australian bases. He came out of New Guinea on a troop transport through the Coral Sea battle. His future plans involve a tour of all operational areas in the Pacific.

His wife is a New Zealander who was special writer for the "Dominion," Wellington, and for the "Radio Record." She is now publicity officer for the Australian Red Cross. They have a two-year-old daughter, Susan, whom her father says he proposes to teach to read but not to write.

murdered many white prospectors and patrol officers. White remarked mildly that he found the Kukus extremely shy and friendly and very grateful for the two packets of salt he had brought as a present. They ate it greedily in double handfuls!

Early in July the correspondents found the first commando post. Some months before the force had been taken by air to a secret airfield in the interior and was now thoroughly familiar with the country and Japanese methods.

"Helped by the New Guinea scouts—a magnificent band of men recruited from miners and prospectors who know every inch of the country—those youngsters had the Japanese jungle fighters absolutely flat footed," White said. "We were with them for the classic Salamaua raid when 80 commandos killed more than 200 Japanese, burned the town of Salamaua itself, destroyed valuable dumps, and withdrew without a single casualty."

The scouts particularly roused White's enthusiasm. "When their story is told fully," he declared, "they'll make Buffalo Bill look like a sissy! Forty miles a day on foot through the roughest country in the world is nothing to them. They can move as silently as panthers—and their fighting qualities are as deadly. Most of them have cultivated long patriarchal beards as a protection against bush mites and mosquitoes. 'They're the finest company in the world, but truly dreadful men to walk behind!'"

Back to Port Moresby

The news of the Buna landing trickled through just in time to stop White and Parer setting off to follow the Owen Stanley Range 200 miles south-east to Kokoda. They would have had a Japanese reception committee to meet them had their schedule been set two days earlier.

White left Parer to complete his films, sitting in a tree two hundred yards from the Japanese-occupied aerodrome at Alamaua, and made a dash to the secret air-field where he heard a plane was due. He wanted to get back in time to report the battle for the Owen Stanley mountains.

He made an 80-mile trip in two days and arrived with an hour or two to spare. The hardest part of the whole adventure, he said, was sitting still in an unarmed transport plane gaining height to cross the mountains within seven minutes' flying time of a Jap fighter base.

Disastrous Air Raid

Back at Moresby, he sought permission to accompany the first force to trek

(Continued on next page)