

Somewhere in New Guinea
23 April 44

Dear Major,

Wherever the American soldier goes, there also goes one of those principles for which he is fighting in every corner of the world--Freedom of Worship. Brought up in Christian homes for the most part, the American soldier takes time out from his task of destruction to worship God--to worship his own God in the manner he chooses.

Today I attended the dedicatory service of an Army chapel in New Guinea.

Last week there was a ~~hog~~ swampy bog in one corner of our little "hole in the jungle." Kunai grass ~~and some other plants~~ scarcely shaded by a dwarfed tree grew sparsely in the mud.

Today, on this spot, Chaplain H. L. Bussman, of Rochester, Minn., stood before a snow-white altar and dedicated the chapel he had built to the free worship of God.

~~Which~~ "This chapel is a modest one and in it you see no similarity to the great churches of our homeland," he ~~said~~ said. ~~It is worth only a few Australian pounds in physical value. But to us it is to be valued as great as any cathedral, for it is a place where we can worship God.~~ "It is worth only a few Australian pounds in physical value. But to us it is to be valued as great as any cathedral, for it is a place where we can worship God."

Into the building of Chaplain Bussman's chapel went thatching and woven cane panels made by pagan natives of New Guinea; lumber from Australia, and many man-hours of labor by American soldiers. An Army hospital tent is its roof, and surmounted by a glistening white bamboo cross.

The bog is now covered with white sand and instead of kunai grass, beautiful flowering shrubs and palm trees grow, transplanted from the jungle.

About a hundred officers and enlisted men crowded the little chapel's rough-hewn benches at the dedicatory service. Several denominations were represented and Chaplain Bussman explained that worship services of all creeds would be conducted in this chapel.

As the khaki-clad men sang "Onward Christian Soldiers," my gaze wandered to the nearby jungle wall where hundreds of songbirds sang too in the vine-entwined trees. Into our little clearing the sun's rays shone about the rude chapel and I felt that I was in a holy place. The atmosphere I breathed was the same ~~in~~ that I first experienced in a little white church on the banks of the Topisaw river in ~~the~~ South Mississippi. The same atmosphere that ~~meets~~ permeates the finest church ~~in~~ there in Jackson.

Because he wears a "lap-lap" sarong instead of trousers and shirt; because he goes in for rings in the ears and sticks in the nose instead of loud neckties; because he sleeps by preference on a bamboo rack instead of in a bed--because he is a "savage" to the civilized white man, the Melanesian native is often misunderstood by soldiers from the United States.

We are prone to regard the New Guinea natives as ~~misleading~~ ignorant aborigines. We laugh at their simplicity and often fail to give them credit for the keen intelligence some really have.

Major Frank McKee, of Meridian, told me of an incident which revealed the "Boong boy's" insight into the greatness of the universe.

A muscular black boy came jogging along a trail, Frank said, swinging his spear casually over his shoulder and apparently in somewhat of a hurry.

The native stopped and grinned and bobbed his ~~head~~ bushy head. "Good day, American, good day, my friend," he said--then bumming the inevitable cigaret.

"What's your rush, boy?" Frank wanted to know, and the boy answered: "Pretty soon bye em bye, light he finis. I go my house." ~~and~~ He waved toward the setting sun.

This amused Frank, so he asked the near-naked native, "What makes the light-what is the sun?"

