

SOMEWHERE ON MAJURO ATOLL, Marshall Islands, 21 March 1945 - Sixty-seven emaciated, half-starved Koreans are safe at this U. S. Naval Air Base today - perhaps the happiest war prisoners in the entire Pacific.

Participants in what is believed to have been the first Korean uprising against the Japanese in the Central Pacific since the war began, the group are the sole survivors of an original company of 193 men stationed on Chiribun Island, at the southeast corner of Japanese-occupied Mille Atoll.

The long-planned revolt, which finally occurred last Saturday (March 17th), cost the lives of approximately 25 of the miserably-armed insurgents. An estimated 100 more killed themselves with hand grenades and dynamite rather than surrender or suffer the disgrace of death at the hands of the Japanese. Eight Marshallese natives, including one woman, were also casualties in the heavily one-sided battle.

Observance of their plight by an American pilot and the subsequent dispatch of U. S. Navy vessels to the scene made possible the rescue of the remaining Koreans.

From Mille, long-since bypassed in the Yank drive toward Tokyo, the Koreans told of how its Japanese defenders are starving to death at the rate of as many as ten a day on the devastated, once-powerful Nipponese bastion.

Not only are the rice, salmon and other Japanese food supplies only a memory, but even native staples such as coconut, breadfruit and taro have been practically exhausted, and the debilitated enemy are subsisting on grass, leaves and lizards.

The evacuees revealed that Japanese officers at the atoll's western end force their men, as well as the Koreans and natives, to forage for them

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throughout the various islands, then fight amongst themselves for the sparse collections. So desperate is the food situation, said the prisoners, that they even trade hand-grenades to procure sustenance. (These grenades, ostensibly to be used for dynamiting fish, were the means by which the Koreans staged their revolt).

Disputing the widely-circulated contention that the Japanese are able to bear hardships on a par with native populations, the Koreans cited the heavy Nipponese death rate compared to the few, if any, losses from malnutrition suffered by the Marshallese and their own members on Mille. This they attributed to their more adaptable constitutions, a better mental attitude and a willingness to share what little they had for the good of all.

The Koreans disclosed that groups of famished Japanese from Mille Island, site of the battered enemy air base, and other main islands in that area, are regularly dispatched to other sections of the atoll to search for what food they can find. Acute malnutrition causes the deaths of many of these men, who often fail to return to their regular stations.

Only the Japanese officers - not the enlisted personnel - retain "the martial spirit," revealed the prisoners, for by comparison they are the only "healthy ones." Using all sorts of devices, they manage to obtain the best of the meager selection of food on Mille. With the supply of saki long ago consumed, the Nipponese will now sacrifice almost anything for "jukru," the native Marshallese drink made from coconut tree sap.

On the main islands of Mille, said the Koreans, the Japanese still display dirty, tattered uniforms. But on many of the smaller islets, the enemy garrisons are reduced to wearing only loincloths. On Mille itself, where once there were extensive installations, there are today only a few huts left standing. Most of the Nipponese are forced to live in dusty bomb shelters. A few on smaller islets live native-style in pandanus-thatched, rotting Marshal-

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The newly-captured prisoners, who arrived at Mille in 1942, stated there is no medicine left on the atoll. Since December, 1943, no mail has been delivered. The last Japanese plane was in the air in February of the same year. No enemy submarines are believed to have been in the area since last June. From the numerous small craft which only fourteen months ago served Mille, only two motor launches - kept running on a fast-dwindling supply of gasoline - remain.

Communications on the atoll and to the outside world have been almost completely disrupted, according to the Koreans, and only two or three radios remain in use. Through these, however, the Japanese have managed to keep surprisingly well-informed about the war and their information is passed on to the Marshallese and Koreans.

For example, the Iwo Jima battle and the Mindanao invasion are known to all the Korean group here. Although the run-of-the mill Japanese on Mille are discouraged and convinced that Japan has already lost the war, the Nipponese officers appear to be still confident of ultimate success.

One of the leaders of the Korean prisoners here smilingly recalled a recent broadcast from Tokyo by Emperor Hirohito which stated, in effect: "Nowadays, the Americans are bombing Japan itself, but the war is moving slowly. In five or ten years, the tide of battle will change and Japan will certainly win."

The Koreans, whose nation has been a vassal of Japan for more than 35 years, told of how they had been conscripted by force into labor battalions with the threat: "Any enemy of Japan must be killed." They had been paid an average of six dollars monthly during their sijnurn on Mille and were treated with even more abuse than the Marshallese.

Still making an effort to reside in luxury, the elusive captives
mandar at Mille - a Navy captain - who was recently reported to have been sub-
sisting in a de-luxe dugout furnished with items stolen from nearly everyone,
was described by the Koreans as being "short, fat and hungry, just like us."

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they claim only an unquenchable hate.

Informed here that a Korean government-in-exile at Chungking had very recently declared war against Japan, the prisoners seemed to be carried away with an overwhelming enthusiasm and displayed much emotion. They cheered lustily when told that the United Nations victory would probably mean independence from the Japanese. Here was news the enemy on Mille had never revealed.

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"We have had this hope all our lives," exclaimed one of the prisoners. "All our hopes have been placed in America. Words are not enough to express our feelings."

Another Korean said he spoke on behalf of the others in hoping they might have an opportunity "to work to help the United States win the war."

"America is like a father," continued another.

Quartered in a former Japanese seaplane hanger on this atoll - quite probably built by other Korean laborers - the Mille evacuees are now receiving medical attention and the first solid food they have received in well over a year.

"On Mille we had no white rice, no good food, no cots to sleep on for the whole time we were there," disclosed one Korean. On Majuro, there was plenty of white rice (with second helpings, too), clean cots and clothing for the half-starved prisoners-of-war today.

Navy and Marine Corps personnel guarding the Koreans said they had never seem more appreciative men.

And they have just been shown their first American movie - "Ride 'em, Cowboy," with Abbott and Costello. It seemed to be their biggest treat of all.

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