

AUSTRALIANA

THE BLACK BUSHRANGER

IN 1813 a New South Wales aborigine named Musquito was transported to Tasmania following his murder of an aboriginal woman. At first he was assigned as a servant to a settler, but he soon became famous as a tracker and was employed by the police in hunting down bushrangers.

Musquito's skill and daring won praise from the authorities, and Governor Sorell told him that because he had been "extremely useful and well conducted" he would soon be returned to Sydney as a free man. But the promise was not kept.

One day a convict taunted him and Musquito knocked him down. Afraid of punishment for this offence, he escaped into the bush and became the leader of a group of aboriginal refugees who had broken tribal laws or were fugitives from the whites. Within a year he had trained these shy, inoffensive natives in the art of aggressive war; and though he had formerly joined the whites in outrages against them, they quickly acknowledged his leadership.

About this time the Black War was developing to its terrible climax, and the wildest cruelties were being practised against the natives. Musquito, their adopted warrior, led the natives in their attempts at reprisals. Every move they made, every attack they launched was carefully planned and swiftly executed. They in-

spired such terror that houses, property, and stock were abandoned by the whites in outback areas. In attack they would wait patiently until the settlers' firearms had been discharged and then rush their victims before the arms could be reloaded.

During 1820-1823 his raids became so unbearable that almost the entire resources of the Government were turned against him. For a long time Musquito defied all efforts to capture him, but in 1824 a local aborigine named "Tegg" guided police to his lair, shot him in the leg, and enabled the police to capture him. Musquito was imprisoned, tried, and

the police to capture him. Musquito was imprisoned, tried, and executed, despite the pleas made on his behalf by the Tasmanian natives, and he died in sullen silence on the scaffold in 1825.

Just as doggedly as Musquito had met his fate his former companions continued their hopeless fight against the whites, and, ironically, for a while their leader was Musquito's betrayer, Tegg, who had not been rewarded as promised.

But it is not our purpose here to trace the later fate of the unfortunate Tasmanian aborigines. Suffice to say that the death of Musquito deepened their hatred for their oppressors and brought nearer the day of their extermination. But Musquito, the Australian black, had proved that with encouragement and leadership the Tasmanian aborigine was not the dull, incapable being that had been thought.