

Island Hermit Killed By Murderous Tribesmen

**Eric Baum, Former German Army Officer, Slain By
Cooka-Cookas**

Associated Press

August 6, 1931

DOREY, New Guinea, Aug. 6 (AP) — Three naked, emaciated Kanaka boys, plunging breathless and exhausted into a Dutch outpost near here, have brought a strange tale of the death of Eric Baum, former officer in the German imperial army.

Baum went "bush" during the war, shortly after Australian troops arrived in New Guinea, it is told, and wandered for years in the mountains of the island, clad only in a ragged piece of cloth, bare-footed, living as best he could, picking up native dialects— and always searching for gold.

He found gold near Surprise, Creak, a tributary of the Watut river, and might have taken some of it back to civilization with him had he not run afoul of the dreaded Cooka-Cookas, the only truly nomadic tribe of New Guinea.

Fierce, intractable and treacherous, the Cooka-Cookas raid in the dead of night, traveling over roughest country in order to surprise their victims. They are sometimes compared with the panther men of West Africa.

Baum, the Kanaka boys related, appeared to think that his knowledge of the natives and their language would enable him to control them. He settled down with 12 Kanaka carriers to work his vein of gold quartz and Induced the to Cooka-Cookas to bring them food every day — for regular rates of pay.

After a while the bags of yams became lighter and lighter. Baum protested in vain and at length when an almost empty bag WAS brought him he ordered the natives to take it away.

Instantly the Cooka-Cookas rushed upon him and killed him, afterwards performing a wild ceremonial dance. They then attacked the 12 Kanaka boys and killed nine of them.

The other three, by means of the most skillful bushcraft, managed to elude their pursuers and bring back the grim story of Baum's end.

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The killing of the German gold prospector by Kukukuku people is mentioned in professor Paula Brown's 1995 book *Beyond a Mountain Valley*. However, the story of the Kanaka boys being killed and the framing generally is more dubious.