

WINNIE the War Winner was one of the more ingenious pieces of Australian military invention during World War II.

"Winnie" was a bits-and-pieces wireless set built by Australian troops who continued to fight the Japanese as guerrillas after Timor was overrun in early 1942.

It was largely the brainchild of Signaller L.M. Loveless, a radio mechanic of the 2/2 Independent (commando) company which formed the core of the guerrilla band.

"Winnie" was heard for the first time in Darwin on April 20, 1942. Australian signals officers were amazed to hear the weak signal, which lasted only minutes before the makeshift set's batteries failed.

Major B.J. Callinan, second in command of the guerrilla force, was to write of the ingenuity that overcame battery-charging problems for "Winnie".

"The set occupied a room about 3m square, and there were bits and pieces spread around on benches and joined by wires trailing across the floor.

"Batteries were charged by a generator taken from an old car and driven by a rope which passed around a small grooved wheel attached to the armature of the generator, and around a similar wheel about 18 inches in diameter.

"Attached to this latter wheel was another wheel, around which a further rope passed onto a wheel about four feet or more in diameter, and to this large wheel were fixed handles by which four natives turned the machine."

The astonishment that accompanied the first radio contact the guerrillas still fighting in Timor achieved with Australia was clouded with doubt about its authenticity.

But this was soon dispelled, and arrangements were made to drop batteries to the Australians.

This, however, did not eventuate for some weeks because of a number of mishaps and misunderstandings.

When supplies were eventually dropped, the isolation the Australian Diggers had endured for weeks was ended, and their effectiveness against the Japanese greatly enhanced.

During this period, the Australians — known as Sparrow Force — suggested that if there was an intention to re-take Timor from the Japanese, it could, with 300 guerrilla reinforcements, mop up the main 1500-strong enemy force at Dili!

Australian commanders replied that they had no plan to reinforce the Sparrow Force men or withdraw them, but that they should maintain their offensive spirit and continue their guerrilla activities.

The Australians, with 300 fighting troops supplemented by local guerrillas, then began a series of harassing raids against the Japanese.

Major Callinan later wrote: "One typical raid was carried out

Winnie pooh-poohs the Japanese army



The makeshift "Winnie" in action in Timor



by Sgt (H.E.) James, who with two sappers sat less than 100 yards from a Japanese post for two days.

"When he knew the routine of the post well, he decided that the best time to strike was just as the enemy were having breakfast.

"So the following morning there was a sharp burst of fire and 12 Japanese were killed, the raiders disappearing into the scrub."

Major Callinan said hardly a week went by without two or three such successful raids, and their effect on Japanese morale was enormous.

"Japanese soldiers told natives that the Australians were devils who jumped out of the ground, killed Japanese and then disappeared, while their officers complained that though they had been fighting them for months, many had never seen an Australian."

Callinan reported that the Japanese placed a price of 100 pataccas

— about \$16 — on the head of each Australian soldier, and 1000 pataccas on Callinan's own head in an effort to obtain help from the natives.

In May, 1942, the Australians, blackened with soot and grime, crept into the outskirts of Dili along deep stormwater drains.

As they stole along the flanks of streets, they could see Japanese soldiers resting, or talking in lamplit huts.

Attacking a machine-gun post, they touched off a melee of fire that lasted about 10 minutes before beginning a withdrawal.

ALL the Australians got clean away, the Japanese apparently being too disorganised by the attack to pursue them.

By the end of May, the Australians, with their morale sky high, had become a picturesque band.

Tattered and bearded, each man had acquired a loyal native as his personal assistant.

Air drops and naval launches were keeping them supplied with urgent necessities, and Callinan was pro-

moted to Lt Col to command the Independent Company.

About this time, the Australian Government learned of a proposal by the Portuguese Government for the withdrawal of Japanese troops from Timor in exchange for the surrender of the Australian guerrillas, who were then to be interned by the neutral Portuguese.

The proposal was rejected.

The Japanese then stepped up their campaign against the guerrillas, methodically bombing known Australian areas of strength from the air and turning the natives against them.

Specially-selected natives were used to move among the general population and complete the demoralisation the bombings had begun.

BY August 20, Callinan's headquarters had been almost cut off by the Japanese, and had headed into high mountain country.

The commander knew his position was desperate; his men were tired and hungry, and transport was difficult; his serviceable radio batteries were almost expended, but he sent a message asking Australia to send money to coax food and transport from the natives.

The same day, RAAF Hudsons were over the area dropping the vital supplies, and the Australians were planning an attack they hoped would stave off the final Japanese thrust.

That night, the Japanese shot a green flare into the sky above the town of Same, and the Australians were convinced this was the signal for their final destruction or dispersal.

Next day, they discovered that the Japanese were withdrawing. So they hurried after them, harassing their rear and flanks.

The Japanese, heavily reinforced with fresh troops, continued to try to destroy the Australians, using native recruits and fomenting rebellion against the Portuguese.

By November, 1942, the 2/2 Independent Company had been in action as a guerrilla force for nine months, and was near the end of its endurance.

The 2/2 Ind Coy guerrillas were eventually withdrawn from Timor in mid-December, 1942, leaving the 2/4 Ind Coy to keep up the harassment against the Japanese.

The 2/4 Ind Coy was withdrawn in early January, 1943, leaving only a small party of Australians known as "S" Force under Lt H. Flood to continue to observe and report on Japanese activities.