ONE PEOPLE

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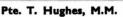
THE SITUATION AND THE MAN

In December, 1942, supported by tanks, the 18th Infantry Brigade of the Australian Imperial Force went into action at Buna on the north coast of Papua. In the face of unyielding entrenched Japanese positions American troops had been unable to advance. So the fresh Australians were determined that they would have to be killed to be stopped. They walked upright with seeming nonchalance directly at a line of Japanese strong points which stretched like an unseen bar before them. The American General wrote:

> "It was a spectacular and dramatic assault and a brave one . . . behind the tanks went the fresh Aussie veterans, tall, moustached, erect, with their blazing tommy guns swinging before them. Concealed Japanese positions—which were even more formidable than our patrols had indicated—burst into flame. There was the greasy smell of tracer fire . . . and heavy machine gun fire from barricades and entrenchments. Steadily tanks and infantrymen advanced through the sparse, high coconut trees, seemingly impervious to the heavy opposition."

In the days which immediately followed, the 2/10th Battalion (from South Australia) fought fiercely and at great cost to themselves to clear the Japanese from one of the airstrips. On the 26th December three of their companies attacked up the strip. Of one of these, the Australian Official History records that " it seemed for a time to disappear into a welter of confused fighting . . . By mid-morning, however, they had burst through the positions which had been blocking them in the centre of the strip itself with Pte. Hughes . . . outstanding even among his fiercely fighting comrades as

Pte. T. Hughes, M.M.   " Neighbour"