

# *SPEAKING OF PICTURES...*

## *... CANNIBALS ROAST A MAN*

Not pretty but as overpowering as a knockout punch front Joe Louis is the monstrous sight shown here of nine cannibals roasting parts of a man's body. Probably the most daring photograph ever taken of cannibals, it is now published here for the first time from the files of Osa and the late Martin Johnson.

The cannibals - all male - have paused briefly during the long ceremonial dance they perform to the accompaniment of sizzling human flesh to gaze at their meal. The piece second from left on the spit is a lower leg and foot. The large piece at the right is probably a stomach. The rest are entrails.

The shot was sneaked by Osa Johnson, then 18 and fresh out of high school and a vaudeville tour, who hid unobserved in the tall cane grass of the bush while exploring the island of Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides group in 1912. As a foretaste of grim sights to come, she and her husband had a few minutes earlier passed several extinguished fires next to which lay the charred skulls of human victims (*below*). Four of these skulls now repose as souvenirs in the garage of Osa's mother in Chanute, Kan.



This human skull (*arrow*) was encased in clay, then baked by cannibals in order to preserve it as a trophy in a native hut.

Despite official denials, cannibalism is still prevalent today among several South Sea Island, African and South American tribes. The notion, however, that cannibals boil uninvited missionaries in big, black cast-iron pots is largely fiction. Usually they roast human parts over a spit, as in this picture. By no means a regular item of diet, human flesh is eaten in the Hebrides in the belief that from it the eater will inherit the fighting qualities of the victim. Victims in such cases are males, usually brave warriors from enemy tribes.

As a dish, roasted human flesh has no sharply defined taste like goat, game or pork. Described minutely in *Jungle Ways* by William Seabrook, who sat down once, with a bottle of wine, bowl of rice, pepper and salt at hand, to sample a freshly roasted Ivory Coast native in Africa, "it was like good, fully developed veal. The roast was tender.... The steak was slightly tougher than prime veal, but not too tough or stringy to be agreeably edible."



Osa Johnson sneaked this shot, unobserved and from a distance, of the cannibals singing and dancing around their human barbecue. Dance lasts for several hours.



Stealing closer, she got this better view of the celebrating cannibals. The regular diet of these savages is fish, fruit, vegetables and an occasional jungle boar.



Closest she dared go was this. These cannibals live in huts with roofs of grass and leaves. Their women wear human bones through their noses for decoration.

