

The Great Emu War of 1932

The Australian government started a program in 1915 to settle ex-soldiers in western Australia to raise wheat and sheep. These new farmers had a problem with the European wild rabbits that were introduced in 1859 to Australia by Thomas Austin. He had 13 rabbits imported and allowed them to run free on his land. The rabbits adapted to the new habitat at an amazing rate.

The new farmers in western Australia were forced to build rabbit-proof fences to keep the rabbits out of their crops. Then came the emus—tall, flightless birds that could stand as high as six feet. They migrated to their breeding grounds each year and saw the rich, new farms as ideal. These big birds were able to knock down the rabbit-proof fences and destroy the crops.

The farmers asked the government for help, which resulted in the ex-soldiers being provided Lewis machine guns. The Emu War started on Nov. 2, 1932, when a group of some 50 emus were spotted. The first battle saw just a few of the emus being killed, with the rest retreating in good order. They adapted well to the battle conditions.

On Nov. 4, soldiers planned an attack against a group of some 1,000 emus. As the emus approached, the machine guns jammed, marking a clear victory for the emus. The war had turned into a guerrilla war. The officer in command of the soldiers said that the emus had set up a command leader in each group and that if emus had been armed with weapons, they could have matched any army at the time. There were over 2,500 rounds of ammunition fired at the emus, with very few being killed.

The war was called off on Dec. 10, 1932. The emus were victorious!

A little side note: Mark Twain said that “God created war so the Americans would learn geography.”