5

Ya̧nomamö Warfare

Levels of Violence

THE FEAST AND ALLIANCE can and often do fail to establish stable, amicable relationships between sovereign villages. When this happens, the groups may coexist for a period of time without any overt expressions of hostility. This, however, is an unstable situation, and no two villages that are within comfortable walking distance from each other can maintain such a relationship indefinitely: They must become allies, or hostility is likely to develop between them. Indifference leads to ignorance or suspicion, and this soon gives way to accusations of sorcery. Once the relationship is of this sort, a death in one of the villages will be attributed to the malevolent *hekura* sent by shamans in the other village, and raids will eventually take place between them.

Ya̧nomamö warfare proper is the raid. That is, not all of their feuding and squabbles can be considered as war, although the values associated with war—bellicosity, ferocity, and violence—undoubtedly increase the amount of all kinds of fighting.

War is only one form of violence in a graded series of aggressive activities (Chagnon 1967). Indeed, some of the other forms of fighting, such as the formal chest-pounding duel, may even be considered as the antithesis of war, for it provides an alternative to killing. Duels are formal and are regulated by stringent rules about proper ways to deliver and receive blows. Much of Ya̧nomamö fighting is kept innocuous by these rules so that the concerned parties do not have to resort to drastic means to resolve their grievances. The three most innocuous forms of violence, chest pounding, side slapping, and club fights, permit the contestants to express their hostilities in such a way that they can continue to remain on relatively peaceful terms with each other after the contest is settled. Thus, Ya̧nomamö culture calls forth aggressive behavior, but at the same time provides a regulated system in which the expressions of violence can be controlled.

The most innocuous form of fighting is the chest-pounding duel described in the last chapter. These duels usually take place between the members of different villages and are precipitated by such minor affronts as malicious gossip, accusations of cowardice, stinginess with food, or niggardliness in trading.

If such a duel is escalated, it usually develops into a side-slapping contest. Occasionally, the combatants will sue for the use of machetes and axes, but this is rare. If machetes are used, the object of the contest still remains the same: Injure your opponent seriously enough so that he will withdraw from the contest, but try not to draw blood. Hence, opponents strike each other with only the flat of the blade when they resort to machetes.

In some areas the Yąnomamö modify the chest-pounding duel in another way: The opponents hold rocks in their clenched fists and strike their adversaries on the chest with an even more stunning blow. They try not to let the stone itself touch the flesh of the man they are fighting. Even without the use of stones, however, they are able to deliver their blows with such force that some of the participants cough up blood for days after having been in a duel.

Club fights represent the next level of violence. These can take place both within and between villages. Most of the club fights result from arguments over women, but a few of them develop out of disputes associated with food theft. Dikawä, a young man about twenty years old, came home one day and discovered a bunch of eating bananas his father, about fifty-five years old, had hung up in his house, above his hearth, to ripen in the smoke. Dikawä, however, ate a number of them without his father's permission. When his father discovered the theft, he ripped a pole out of his house and began clubbing Dikawä. Dikawä armed himself with a similar club and attacked his father, precipitating a general melee that soon involved most of the men in the village, each taking the side of the father or son, as they saw fit. In brawls such as these, many individuals join in the fighting just to keep the sides even; if a group is badly outnumbered, they will be joined by friends whose sense of fairness stimulates them to take sides, no matter what the issue is. The net result of the above fight was a number of lacerated skulls, bashed fingers, and sore shoulders. The contestants try to hit each other on the top of the head, but when the fight gets out of hand, the participants swing wildly and rarely hit their opponents on the skull. More frequently, the blow lands on the shoulder or arm.

The clubs used in these fights are, ideally, 8 to 10 feet long. They are very wiry, quite heavy, and deliver a tremendous wallop. In general shape and dimensions, they resemble pool cues, but are nearly twice as long. The club is held at the thin end, which is frequently sharpened to a long point in case the fighting escalates to spear thrusting, in which case the club is inverted and used as a pike.

Most duels start between two men, usually after one of them has been caught *en flagrante* trysting with the other's wife. The enraged husband challenges his opponent to strike him on the head with a club. He holds his own club vertically, leans against it and exposes his head for his opponent to strike. After he has sustained a blow on the head, he can then deliver one on the culprit's skull. But as soon as blood starts to flow, almost everybody rips a pole out of the house frame and joins in the fighting, supporting one or the other of the contestants.

Needless to say, the tops of most men's heads are covered with long, ugly scars of which their bearers are immensely proud. Some of them, in fact, keep their head cleanly shaved on top to display these scars, rubbing red pigment on their bare scalps to define them more precisely. Viewed from the top, the skull of an accomplished man of forty years looks like a road map, for it is criss-crossed by as many as twenty large scars (see

Fig. 5–1). Others keep their heads shaved for decorative reasons only, irrespective of the number of scars they bear. Some do not shave their heads at all.

Club fighting is frequent in large villages, primarily because there are more opportunities for men to establish clandestine sexual liaisons without getting caught at it. Most affairs are, however, discovered. The larger the village, the more frequent the club fighting; and as fighting increases, so too does the probability that the village will fission and result in two separate groups. Most village fissioning I investigated resulted from a specific club fight over a woman, a fight that was merely one such incident in a whole series of similar squabbles.

The village of Patanowä-teri split during the last month of my first field trip. One of the young men took the wife of another because she was allegedly being mistreated by him. This resulted in a brutal club fight that involved almost every man in the village. The fight escalated to jabbing with the sharpened ends of the clubs when the husband of the woman in question was speared by his rival and wounded. The headman of the village, a brother of Kąobawä, had been attempting to keep the fighting restricted to clubs. When the husband's rival speared his opponent, the headman went into a rage and speared him in turn, running his own sharpened club completely through the young man's body. He died when they tried to remove the weapon. The wife was then given back to her legitimate husband, who punished her by cutting both her ears off with his machete.

The kinsmen of the dead man were then ordered to leave the village before there was further bloodshed. The aggrieved faction joined the Monou-teri and the Bisaasi-teri because these two groups were at war with their natal village, and they knew that they would have an opportunity to raid their own village to get revenge. The Monou-teri and the two Bisaasi-teri groups accepted these new arrivals; they were kinsmen and would actively prosecute the war against the Patanowä-teri. The hosts, of course, took several women from the refugees, the price a vulnerable group must pay for protection.

Spears are not commonly used by the Yąnamanö. A rare form of fighting, however, does involve the use of these weapons. It is a formal contest in the sense that the fight is prearranged and the participants agree beforehand to refrain from using their bows and arrows. Fights such as these take place when the members of two villages are not angry enough with each other to shoot to kill, but are too furious to be able to satisfy their grudges with chest pounding or club fighting.

The spears themselves are about 6 feet long, lightweight, and frequently painted with red and black designs. They are merely peeled saplings sharpened to a long point at the heavy end. Each man makes several of them.

The single spear-throwing incident that took place during my fieldwork started over a woman. Her husband had been very cruel to her, so the woman's brother, the headman of one of the villages north of Kąobawä's area, took her away from him by force. This enraged his entire following, which was considerably smaller than that of the wife's brother. A club fight temporarily settled the dispute, but the smaller of the groups was thoroughly trounced by the followers of the wife's brother. They challenged their adversaries to a spear fight and notified them they were going to return with reinforcements.

The woman over which the dispute began then ran away from her brother and rejoined her husband. But the die was cast and the fight was now a matter of pride, the

Fig. 5-1. Karöma, one of Kąobawä's daughters, picking lice out of her grandfather's battered head—his scars are from club fights. She wears decorative sticks inserted in the corners of her mouth as a beauty aid. These were inserted at about age five, together with one in the lower lip and another in the nasal septum.

original cause being quite irrelevant. Each of the principals in the dispute busily recruited aid from their allies. Kąobawä's group sent a delegation of young men to the village that took the woman away from the cruel husband.

When the cruel husband's incensed group and their allies arrived, about a week after the challenge, they entered their opponent's village and drove them out in a hail of spears. Many of them were wounded superficially, but one old man, not able to dodge missiles as well as he used to, suffered a bad wound and subsequently died. The victors stole all the hammocks, machetes, and cooking pots they could find and fled. The losers regrouped and gave chase, this time intending to escalate the fight to shooting. Some of them tied pieces of steel to their spears to make them more effective.

They caught up to the victorious group and another spear fight took place. This time tempers grew hot because one man in each of the fighting groups had managed to borrow a shotgun from the missionaries associated with the respective villages; these were repeatedly discharged over the heads of the fighters. The Yąnomamö had deceived the missionaries into loaning them two guns on the pretext of getting fresh game for the mission personnel. One of the shotgun-wielding Indians, standing at the front of his group, was struck by two sharpened spears. At this, he discharged his shotgun into the face of the headman of the other group, terminating the fight. The wounded man nearly died from the blast, but after many months of nursing by the missionaries he managed to recover. He still carries several balls of lead in his face.[1] Thereafter, the two groups were at war and raided each other with the intention of killing.

The Raid and Nomohoni

The raid is the next level in the scale of violence; this is warfare proper. The objective of the raid is to kill one or more of the enemy and flee without being discovered. If, however, the victims of the raid discover their assailants and manage to kill one of them, the campaign is not considered to be a success, no matter how many people the raiders may have killed before sustaining their single loss. Rerebawä told me of a raid he went on several years before I arrived. They managed to kill the headman of the village they raided, abduct his small son, and kill one more man as he fled to the village to recruit help. They were chased, but kept ahead of their pursuers for almost two days. Their pursuers caught up with them after dark on the second day and attacked them while they slept. They killed one man in his hammock, but in so doing, alarmed the others. A skirmish between the two groups developed, and the raiders managed to kill two more of their enemy in this struggle. Still, according to Rerebawä, the raid was not a good one because one of their own men was killed. The son of the slain headman was later shot by Torokoiwä, who presently lives in Monou-teri. The little boy was persecuted and tormented by the other children. Finally, Torokoiwä got sick of seeing this, so he shot the little boy as he was bathing in the stream.

[1] The members of two villages in contact with the missions occasionally borrow shotguns from the missionaries. The missionaries are very cautious about loaning the Yąnomamö firearms, knowing that these would be used in the wars. Shotguns are beginning to be rather common in Brazilian Yąnomamö villages, as the Indians there now have opportunities to make contacts with settlers and backwoodsmen and do not have to rely on missionaries for these weapons. This, however, is a recent development. Brazilian Yąnomamö, armed with these shotguns, have raided into Venezuela against villages that have not yet had any contact with outsiders.

Although few raids are initiated solely with the intention of capturing women, this is always a desired side benefit. A few wars, however, are started with the intention of abducting women. I visited a village in Brazil in 1967 that had a critical shortage of women. A group of missionaries had moved into this village a few years earlier and learned of the treachery by which the group managed to obtain a number of their women. One of them gave me this account. The headman of the group organized a raiding party to abduct women from a distant group. They went there and told these people that they had machetes and cooking pots from the foreigners, who prayed to a spirit that gave such items in answer to the prayers. They then volunteered to teach these people how to pray. When the men knelt down and bowed their heads, the raiders attacked them with their machetes and killed them. They captured their women and fled.

Treachery of this kind, the *nomohoni,* is the ultimate form of violence. Ką̈obawä's group suffered a massacre in 1950, as I have mentioned earlier, but the treachery in this case was in revenge for a murder. Still, their assailants attempted to abduct women after the objectives of their treachery were accomplished. Had it not been for their greed to capture women, the massacre would have been even more complete. Many escaped because the assailants turned their attention to the women.

Generally, however, the desire to abduct women does not lead to the initiation of hostilities between groups that have had no history of mutual raiding in the past. New wars usually develop when charges of sorcery are leveled against the members of a different group. Once raiding has begun between two villages, however, the raiders all hope to acquire women if the circumstances are such that they can flee without being discovered. If they catch a man and his wife at some distance from the village, they will more than likely take the woman after they kill her husband. If, however, the raiders are near the village, they may flee without dragging a captured woman along, as the body of their victim will be discovered quickly and pursuit will be immediate. Hence, they do not take a chance on hindering their flight by dragging a reluctant captive with them. A captured woman is raped by all the men in the raiding party and, later, by the men in the village who wish to do so but did not participate in the raid. She is then given to one of the men as a wife. If the captured woman is related to her captors, she is not raped.

Most wars are merely a prolongation of earlier hostilities, stimulated by revenge motives. The first causes of hostilities are usually sorcery, murders, or club fights over women in which someone is badly injured or killed. Occasionally, food theft involving related villages also precipitates raiding. This was the cause of the first raids between Ką̈obawä's group and the Patanowä-teri; they split from each other after a series of club fights over women. Each group made a new garden and returned periodically to the old one to collect peach-palm fruit, a crop that continues to produce long after the garden itself has gone to weeds. Someone stole the peach-palm fruit belonging to a man in the other group, resulting in another food theft for revenge, a club fight, and then raiding, but it should be pointed out that the raiding came about only after a long history of disputes between the groups; food theft was merely the catalyst that finally initiated the hostilities.

The Yą̈nomamö themselves regard fights over women as the primary causes of their wars. I was in one of the more remote villages in 1967, visiting with people I had met on my first field trip. The headman of the village, Säsäwä, coveted my British commando knife and kept begging me to give it to him. He wanted me to tell him all about the knife, its origin, history, and how often it had been exchanged in trades. When I told

him that it was used by people of my "group" when they went on raids against their enemies, his interest shifted to our military exploits.

"Who did you raid?" he asked.

"Germany-teri."

"Did you go on the raid?"

"No, but my father did."

"How many of the enemy did he kill?"

"None."

"Did any of your kinsmen get killed by the enemy?"

"No."

"You probably raided because of woman theft, didn't you?"

"No."

At this answer he was visibly disturbed. He chatted for a moment with the others, seeming to doubt my answer.

"Was it because of witchcraft?" he then asked.

"No," I replied again.

"Ah! Someone stole cultivated food from the other!" he exclaimed, citing confidently the only other incident that is deemed serious enough to provoke man to wage war.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate Yąnomamö warfare, its causes, and the techniques of raid is to give a history of the recent military activities of Monou-teri, a small village that split away from Kąobawä's group in the mid-1950s.

A Specific War

The headman of the village, whom I shall call Damowä (since he was recently killed by raiders), was a particularly aggressive man. According to Rerebawä, Damowä was the only fierce man in the entire village, the true *waiteri* (fierce one) of the group.

Damowä had a habit of seducing the wives of other men, a factor that led to frequent feuding in the village and resulted in a number of club fights. Of the numerous affairs he had, two in particular illustrate the nature of possible consequences. His youngest brother was married to an abducted Shamatari girl. Damowä seduced her, thereby enraging his brother. The young man was afraid to vent his anger on the real culprit, his brother, so, instead, he shot his wife with an arrow. He intended only to wound her, but the arrow struck her in a vital spot and she died.

Manasinawä, a man of some fifty-five years at the present time, joined Damowä's group with his wife and young daughter. He fled from his own village in order to take refuge in a group that was raiding his own village, as he wanted to get revenge against them for a wrong they had committed. Damowä, who already had several wives, decided to take Manasinawä's wife from him and add her to his own family. This resulted in the final club fight that led to the separation of Kąobawä's group from the Monou-teri. Manasinawä's wife took the daughter and fled to yet another village. Kąobawä then organized a raid to recover the woman and child when their protectors refused to give them back. The two were taken by force from this group by Kąobawä's raiders. Nobody

was killed in the incident. Manasinawä, his wife, and his daughter remained with Ką̈obawä's group, and he ultimately gave the daughter to Ką̈obawä for a second wife. Ką̈obawä still has her.

At this time, the groups, of Damowä and Ką̈obawä, respectively, were still at war with the Patanowä-teri, from whom they separated some fifteen years earlier. Damowä's group, after separating from Ką̈obawä's, attempted to make peace with the Patanowä-teri, as they were now vulnerable and could ill afford to remain on hostile terms with them. Damowä's group also made an alliance with the two Shamatari villages, which had given them cooperation when they staged the revenge treacherous feast discussed in the last chapter. For about five years relationships between Damowä's group and the Patanowä-teri were relatively amicable, but as the former's alliances with the Shamatari grew in strength, their relationship to the Patanowä-teri grew cool once again.

The Patanowä-teri then became embroiled in new wars with several villages on the Orinoco River and turned to Ką̈obawä's group for aid, hoping to patch up their old grievances and remain at peace. The first day I began my fieldwork marked the initiation of complete peace between Ką̈obawä's group and the Patanowä-teri: They were having a feast together in Bisaasi-teri. Damowä's group, the Monou-teri, were not participating in the feast, but a large number of men came anyway. They discovered a group of seven Patanowä-teri females outside the main village and could not resist the temptation: They forcefully took them back to Monou-teri. Later that day the Patanowä-teri men discovered that the women were missing, so they searched the neighborhood and found the tracks of the Monou-teri men at the site of the abduction, where signs of struggling abounded. The next morning they went to Monou-teri armed with clubs: They were bound to get their women back, but did not care to start another shooting war with the Monou-teri. They took five of the women away from the Monou-teri in a heated struggle, but had to pull back without the remaining two, unless they were willing to shoot to kill: The Monou-teri were determined to keep the other women at all costs.

The significance of this incident is this: The headman of Monou-teri realized that the Patanowä-teri would not risk getting into a shooting war with them since they already had more enemies than they could comfortably handle. Hence, this provided an excellent opportunity for the Monou-teri to abduct women with relatively little chance of getting shot in retaliation.

Damowä, the headman of Monou-teri, was angry because the Patanowä-teri had recovered so many of their women. He then threatened to ambush the Patanowä-teri when they left for home after the feast at Bisaasi-teri was over. The Patanowä-teri, in view of this, cut their stay short and left for home before the feast was over, hoping to avoid trouble with the Monou-teri.

Damowä was not satisfied, however, that he forced the Patanowä-teri to capitulate, leave for home, and not attempt to recover the two remaining women. He decided to raid them. In January of 1966 he and a party of men from Monou-teri raided the Patanowä-teri at the latter's village. They caught Bosibrei climbing a *rasha* tree, a prickly, cultivated palm that must be climbed slowly and with the aid of a pair of moveable stick frames in order to avoid getting pierced by the needle-sharp thorns that protrude from the tree's trunk (see Fig. 2-6). Bosibrei was almost to the top of the tree when the raiders caught him—he made an excellent target silhouetted against the sky. They shot and killed him with one volley of arrows as he reached for the fruits of the palm. One of

Damowä's brothers—who also participated in this raid—was married to one of the victim's daughters.

The Monou-teri had anticipated their raid by clearing a new garden site across the Mavaca River, where they hoped to take refuge after the inevitable revenge raids from Patanowä-teri began. They had hoped to complete their garden before the raids became intense, as the Mavaca River would have provided a natural obstacle to raiders. The Patanowä-teri, however, were infuriated by this killing and raided the Monou-teri immediately. Two of the raiders were Damowä's "brothers."

The raiders caught Damowä outside the new garden searching for honey. This was in the first week of February. He had two of his wives with him and one child. He was looking up a tree when the raiders shot a volley of arrows into his body, at least five of which struck him in the abdomen. He managed to nock one of his own arrows and shoot at the raiders, although he was probably mortally wounded at the time. Then Bishewä, one of the raiders, shot a final arrow at Damowä, piercing his neck below his ear. He fell to the ground and died after being struck by this arrow.

The raiders did not attempt to abduct the women, as they were close to the Monou-teri campsite and they had to cross the Mavaca River to escape. The women ran back to the village to tell the others what happened. Instead of giving chase, as they ought to have done—according to Kąobawä and the others in Bisaasi-teri—the Monou-teri themselves fled into the jungle and hid until darkness, afraid that the raiders might return.

The man who fired the fatal arrow into Damowä's neck was a son of the man the Monou-teri shot in their raid. Two of the men who shot Damowä were his classificatory brothers (members of the same lineage), three were brothers-in-law (including the man who shot the fatal arrow), and one was a man who had been adopted into the Patanowä-teri village as a child, after he and his mother were abducted from a distant Shamatari village.

The Monou-teri burned the corpse of Damowä the next day. They held a mortuary ceremony that week and invited their allies, members of the two Shamatari villages and the two groups of Bisaasi-teri, to participate. Gourds of the dead man's ashes were given to specific men in several of the allied villages, an act calculated to reaffirm solidarity and friendship. Damowä's widows were given to his two eldest surviving brothers.

Kąobawä, a classificatory brother to Damowä, assumed the responsibility of organizing a revenge raid. Damowä's own brothers failed to step forward to assume this responsibility, and for a while there was no leadership whatsoever in Monou-teri. Finally, Orusiwä, the oldest and most competent member of the *Hor* lineage, emerged as the *de facto* village leader, a position he acquired largely by default. He was related to the slain headman as brother-in-law, and their respective descent groups dominated village politics.[2] Hence, leadership in Monou-teri shifted from the *Sha* lineage to the *Hor* lineage.

Kąobawä delayed the revenge raid until April, giving the Monou-teri time to expand their new garden. This date also coincided with the beginning of the rains, thus reducing the possibility of a retaliation until the next dry season and providing the Monou-teri even more time to expand their new garden and abandon the old one.

The Monou-teri were afraid to return to their producing garden, so they divided their time between their newly cleared site, where they worked at cutting timber and

[2] See Table 3-1 and Fig. 3-5 of Chapter 3 for the lineage composition of Monou-teri.

burning it, and Kąobawä's village, where they took occasional rests to regain their energy. They returned to their old site only to collect plantains, which they carried to the new site. Kąobawä's group then built a new *shabono* and fortified it, anticipating the war they knew would be inevitable. Up to this point, Kąobawä's group, Upper Bisaasi-teri, maintained two small *shabonos* a few yards apart from each other, but they coalesced into a single, larger group and moved into the new *shabono* when it was completed. The visiting Monou-teri also helped them work on the new structure.

Meanwhile, the Patanowä-teri, knowing that they would be raided by the Monou-teri and their allies, also began clearing a new garden. They selected a site abandoned by Kąobawä's group many years ago, knowing that the peach-palm trees were still producing there. By this time the Patanowä-teri were in rather desperate straits. Their old enemies, the several groups on the Orinoco River, began raiding them with even greater frequency, as they had learned that the Monou-teri and Bisaasi-teri were again at war with the Patanowä-teri. A few additional villages began raiding the Patanowä-teri to settle old grudges, realizing that the Patanowä-teri had so many enemies that they could not possibly retaliate against all of them.

The Patanowä-teri then began moving from one location to another, hoping to avoid and confuse their enemies. They spent the dry season in turns at their main producing garden, with the Ashadowä-teri, their only ally, and at their new garden. Each group that raided them passed the word to other villages concerning the location of the Patanowä-teri. If they were not at one place, then they had to be at one of the other two. The raids were frequent and took a heavy toll. At least eight people were killed by raiders, and a number of others were wounded. Some of the dead were women and children, a consequence of the fact that the Patanowä-teri themselves sent a heavy volley of arrows into the village of one of their enemies and killed two women. To revenge this, the enemy began deliberately shooting Patanowä-teri women. Females are normally not the target of raiders' arrows. The Patanowä-teri were raided at least twenty-five times while I conducted my fieldwork. They themselves retaliated as frequently as possible, but could not return tit for tat. They managed to drive their main enemies, the Hasaböwä-teri, away from their garden, forcing them to flee across the Orinoco. They concentrated on raiding this group until they had killed most of the *waiteri* (fierce ones). They were so successful at doing this that the Hasaböwä-teri ultimately withdrew from the war. Several of my informants claimed that they did so because their fierce ones were all dead, and nobody was interested in prosecuting the war any further.

When the Hasaböwä-teri withdrew from the raiding, the Patanowä-teri then concentrated on raiding the Monou-teri. Every time the Monou-teri returned to their main site they found the tracks of numerous men who had visited the village, tracks that always came from the direction of Patanowä-teri. Consequently, the Monou-teri moved into Kąobawä's group for protection, fearing to return to their old site until the jungle was completely inundated by the rains.

Kąobawä's group resented this somewhat and made no bones about reminding the Monou-teri that they were eating large quantities of food from the gardens. When complaining became intense, the Monou-teri moved into the village of the Lower Bisaasi-teri and lived off their produce until the latter also began to complain. Then they traveled to the Mǫmariböwei-teri and lived with them for a while, returning to Kąobawä's village when these allies wearied of the visitors. When the hosts, the Lower

Bisaasi-teri, for example, wanted to get rid of the Monou-teri, they would hold a feast in their honor. When the going-home food was presented to them, they had no alternative but to leave. It would have been insulting to remain after the food was presented. In between their moves they returned to their own producing site to collect plantains and carry them to their new garden. They subsisted there off the food they carried with them.

The Monou-teri soon resented being treated like pariahs by their allies and began to regain their courage. Much of this treatment was due to the fact that they failed to chase the raiders when Damowä was slain, displaying cowardice instead of ferocity. Many of the men in the Bisaasi-teri groups resented the Monou-teri for this and were not timid about displaying their disgust. The Monou-teri were a burden, as they rarely helped at expanding Bisaasi-teri's gardens and ate a good deal of the time.

The raid Kąobawä organized to revenge Damowä's death took place late in April. The Shamatari allies—Mǫmariböwei-teri and Reyaböwei-teri—were invited to participate, but they failed to send a contingency. As allies never really trust each other, the raid was delayed because some of the Bisaasi-teri suspected that their allies were waiting for the raiders to leave so that they could descend on the poorly protected women and make off with captives. Finally, a few of them did arrive and the *wayu itou* (warrior line-up) got under way. Still, the Bisaasi-teri feared treachery on the part of their Shamatari friends, so the men of Lower Bisaasi-teri decided to stay home and protect the women left behind by the Monou-teri and Upper Bisaasi-teri raiders. A small feast was held to entertain the visiting Shamatari allies.

On the afternoon of the feast a grass dummy was set up in the village, and the men who were to participate in the raid conducted a mock attack on the dummy, which was supposed to represent the body of a Patanowä-teri man. They painted themselves black, crept slowly around the village with bows and arrows ready, searching for the tracks of the enemy. They converged at one point, spread out, crept toward the dummy, and, at Kąobawä's signal, let fly with a volley of arrows. The Yąnomamö are good archers. None of the arrows missed its mark, and the dummy, looking like a pincushion, toppled ominously to the ground, a dozen or more bamboo-tipped arrows protruding from it. Then the raiders screamed and ran out of the village, simulating their retreat from the enemy. They drifted back into the village, one at a time or in small groups, and retired to their hammocks to wait for darkness.

The village became unusually quiet shortly after dark. Suddenly, the stillness was pierced by an animal-like noise, half-scream and half-growl, as the first raider marched slowly out to the center of the village, clacking his arrows against his bow, growling his individualized fierce noise, usually a mimic of a carnivore: a wasp, or a buzzard. At this signal—not knowing fully what to expect and a little nervous—I crept from my own hammock and went to the center of the village with my tape recorder. The other raiders joined the first man, coming one at a time after short intervals, each clacking his arrows and growling some hideous noise. Kąobawä stood by and made sure the line was straight and faced the direction of the enemy; he would push or pull the individual warriors until they formed a perfectly straight line, joining them after the last one took his place.

The procession to the line-up took about twenty minutes, as about 50 or so men participated (see Fig. 5–2). When the last one was in line, the murmurs among the

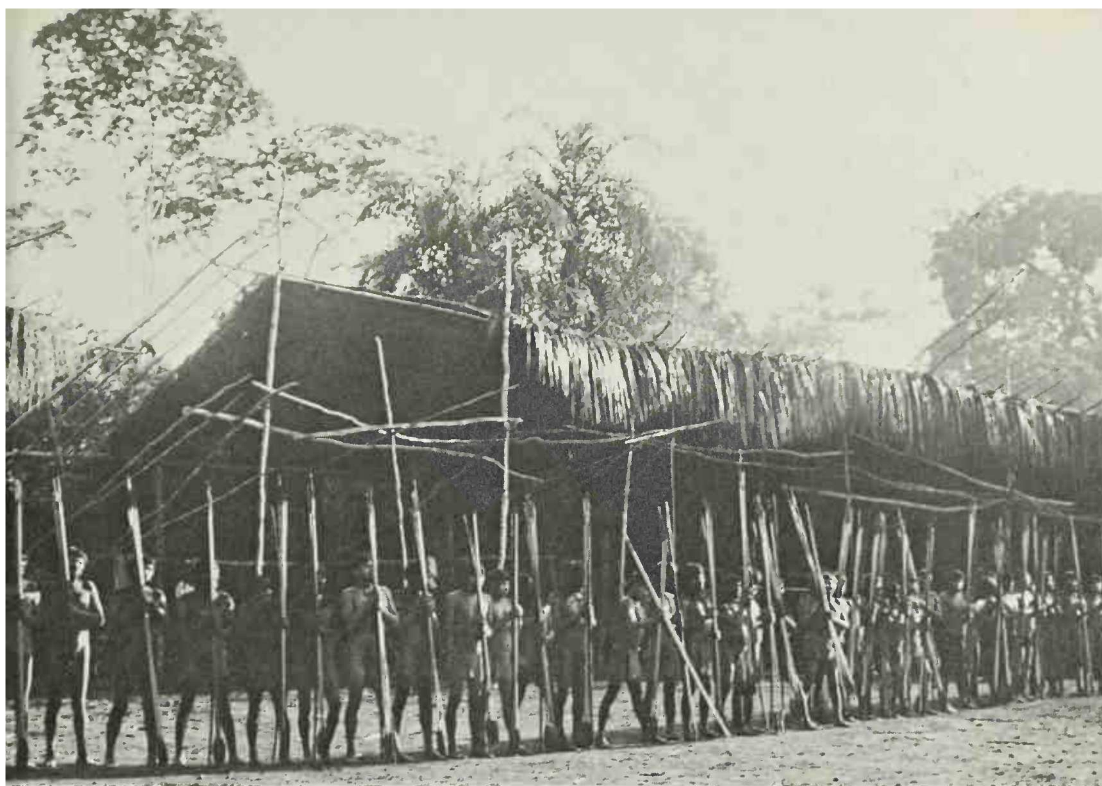

Fig. 5–2. Ką̨obawä's men and their allies lining up (wayu itou) *to raid the Patanowä-teri.*

children and women died down and all was quiet in the village once again. I squatted there, unable to see what was going on, growing more nervous by the moment, half suspecting that the warriors were sneaking up on me to murder me for tape recording a sacred rite. Then the silence was broken when a single man began singing in a deep baritone voice: "I am meat hungry! I am meat hungry! Like the carrion-eating buzzard I hunger for flesh!" When he completed the last line, the rest of the raiders repeated his song, ending in an ear-piercing, high-pitched scream that raised goose bumps all over my arms and scalp. A second chorus, led by the same man, followed the scream. This one referred to meat hunger of the kind characteristic of a particular species of carnivorous wasp. They screamed again, becoming distinctly more enraged. On the third chorus, they referred again to the buzzard's meat hunger, and a few men simultaneously interjected such descriptions of their ferocity as: "I'm so fierce that when I shoot the enemy my arrow will strike with such force that blood will splash all over the material possessions in his household!"

Then the line of warriors broke, and the men gathered into a tight formation, weapons held above their heads. They shouted three times, beginning modestly and increasing their volume until they reached a climax at the end of the third shout: "Whaaaa! Whaaaa! WHAAAA!" They listened as the jungle echoed back their last shout, identified by them as the spirit of the enemy. They noted the direction from which the echo came. On hearing it, they pranced about frantically, hissed and groaned, waving their weapons, until Ką̨obawä calmed them down, and the shouting was repeated two more times. At the end of the third shout of the third repetition, the formation broke,

and the men ran back to the respective houses, each making a noise—"Bubububububu-bubu"—as he ran. When they reached their hammocks, they all simulated vomiting, passing out of their mouths the rotten flesh of the enemy they had symbolically devoured in the line-up.

They retired for the night. Many of them wept and moaned, mourning the loss of their friend and kinsman, Damowä. At dawn the women went to the gardens and gathered large quantities of plantains. These were carried to the raiders, wrapped with their vine hammocks, and deposited outside the village for the men to collect as they marched in single file to war.

The men painted themselves black again (Fig. 5-3). Some even put on bright red loincloths which I had traded to them, as the warrior line-up is a spectacle in which the younger men can show off to the girls. The loincloths were left behind when the men departed. They tinkered with their bows and checked to see if the bowstrings were weak at any spot, sharpened their best arrow points, and waited nervously for Kąobawä to signal for the line-up to begin again. The *wayu itou* was repeated, each man marching to the center of the village and taking his place in line. This time, however, they did not sing the war song. They merely shouted, as they had done the previous night, waited for the echo to return, and marched dramatically out of the village. Their mothers and sisters wept or shouted last minute bits of advice as they left the village: "Don't get yourself shot up!" "You be careful now!"

The men picked up their supplies of food where the women had cached them and left for Patanowä-teri. Kąobawä had been complaining all year of severe pains in his lower back, abdomen, and urinal tract, and was in considerable pain when he walked. Still, he insisted on going on the raid, suspecting that the others would turn back if he did not lead it. The raiders had not been gone five hours when the first one came back, a boastful young man, complaining that he had a sore foot and could not keep up with the others. The next day a few more young men returned, complaining that they had malaria and pains in the stomach. They enjoyed participating in the pomp of the *wayu itou,* for this impressed the women, but were, at heart, cowards.

The raiders travel slowly their first day away from the village. They have heavy burdens of food and try to pace themselves so as to arrive in the enemy's territory just as their food runs out. They also attempt to reach a point in the enemy's neighborhood that will permit them to reach his village at dawn: far enough away so that enemy hunters will not discover their presence, but close enough to the village that they can reach it in an hour or so from their last camp.

The men use fire only when they camp at a considerable distance from the enemy's territory. As they approach their destination, they exercise greater caution. Their final evening is spent shivering in the darkness, since they dare not make a fire to warm themselves. Most of the raiders emphasized this, as sleeping without fire is considered to be both dangerous and uncomfortable. The danger lies in the possibility of jaguar attacks, but even more in the fear that spirits will molest the unprotected raiders. On the last evening the raiding party's fierce ones have difficulties with the younger men; most of them are afraid, cold, and worried about every sort of hazard, and all of them complain of sore feet and belly aches.

The raiders always develop a strategy for attacking the unwary enemy. They usually split into two or more groups and agree to meet later at a predetermined location

Fig. 5–3. One of Kąobawä's Shamatari allies, painted black, views the warriors lining up through his bowstring. He waits his turn to join them, a wad of tobacco protruding from his mouth.

at some point between their own village and the enemy's. These smaller groups must contain at least four men, six, if possible. This is so because the raiders retreat in a pattern. While the others flee, two men will lie in ambush, shooting any pursuers that might follow. They, in turn, flee, while their comrades lie in ambush to shoot at their pursuers.

If there are novices in the raiding party, the older men will conduct mock raids, showing them how they are to participate. A grass dummy or soft log is frequently employed in this, as was the case in the *wayu itou* held in the village the day before the raiders left. Particularly young men will be positioned in the marching party somewhere in the middle of the single file of raiders so they will not be the first ones to be exposed to danger should the raiders themselves be ambushed. These young men will also be permitted to retreat first. Damowä had a twelve-year-old son when he was killed. This boy, Matarawä, was recruited into the raiding party to give him an opportunity to avenge his father's death. The older men made sure he would be exposed to minimum danger, as this was his first raid.

The separated groups of raiders approach the village at dawn and conceal themselves near the commonly used paths to the source of drinking water. They wait for the enemy to come to them. A good many of the victims of raids are shot while fetching water.

Frequently, the enemy is wary and acts defensively at all times when there is an active war going on. Only large groups of people can leave the village, and these are well armed. Raiders will not attack a large group such as this. When the enemy is found to be this cautious, the raiders have no choice but to retreat or to shoot volleys of arrows blindly into the village, hoping to strike someone at a distance. They retreat after they release their arrows, depending on the gossip of other villages to learn if their arrows did find their marks. Rarely, one of the raiders will attempt to enter the village during the night and kill someone while he sleeps. Damowä's younger brother allegedly accomplished this on one raid, but few men are brave enough to try it. Most of the time the raiders manage to ambush a single individual, kill him, and retreat before they are discovered. This is considered to be the most desirable outcome of the raid.

The women were nervous, frightened, and irritable while the men were away, and they were constantly on the lookout for raiders from other villages. This is always a time to suspect raiders, since allies occasionally turn on their friends when the women are poorly guarded, abducting as many as possible while their husbands are away.

After several days the women were so frustrated and anxious that fights began to break out among them. One woman got angry because another one, her sister and co-wife, left her to tend a small baby. When the mother returned, the angry one picked up a piece of firewood and bashed her on the side of her head with it, knocking her unconscious and causing her ear to bleed profusely.

The raiders had been gone almost a week when Kąobawä and his youngest brother staggered into the village, nearly dead from exhaustion. Kąobawä's pains had gotten so bad that he decided to turn back just before they reached the Patanowä-teri village. He could barely walk by that time and would not have been able to elude pursuers should the enemy have given chase. Shararaiwä, his brother, decided to accompany him back lest he run into a group of Patanowä-teri hunters, or his condition grow even more severe. Shortly after they had dropped out of the raiding party, Shararaiwä stepped on a snake and was bitten. The rains had started, and the snakes were beginning to concentrate on the higher grounds, making walking a hazard. His leg began to swell immediately, and he could not walk. Hence, Kąobawä had to carry him out on his back, despite the fact that he could barely walk himself. Carrying him for nearly two days, he managed to reach the Orinoco River. Here, he intended to make a bark canoe and float the rest of

the way back down, but they located a dugout canoe someone had concealed,[3] so they borrowed this and reached home about dark, three days after Shararaiwä had been bitten. He survived the snake bite, but Kąobawä was very exhausted from the trip.

That night an advance party of the raiders returned, chanted briefly with Kąobawä, explaining that they had reached Patanowä-teri, shot and killed one man, and fled. The Patanowä-teri pursued them, got ahead of them at one point, and ambushed them when they passed. They wounded Konoreiwä of Monou-teri, shooting a bamboo-tipped arrow completely through his chest just above his heart.

The next morning the main body of raiders returned to the village, carrying Konoreiwä with them in a litter. They had removed the arrow, but he was very weak and continuously coughed up mouthfuls of blood. They put him in a hammock and tended his fire for him. They asked me to treat his wound.

He lay in his hammock for a week, not eating or drinking all that time—the Yąnomamö have a taboo against taking water when wounded with a bamboo-type arrow, and Konoreiwä was slowly wasting away. Finally, I could stand it no longer and made a batch of lemonade. I called for them to gather around, ceremoniously crushed an aspirin into the lemonade, and explained that this was very powerful medicine. So powerful that it had to be diluted with a large amount of water. I then demanded that he take some, which he gladly did, the others not interfering. By then he was so weak that he could not sit up, so I spoon-fed the liquid to him. A knowing glance passed between us as he gulped down the first spoonful of sweet liquid. He ultimately recovered.

The two men who shot the fatal arrows into the Patanowä-teri were both brothers of the slain Damowä. They were killers and had to purify themselves by going through the *unokaimou* ceremony.

They were given spaces in Kąobawä's *shabono* for their hammocks. The area each man occupied was sealed off from the adjoining houses by palm leaves, and the men had their food brought to them for the week they were confined to this small area. They each used a pair of sticks to scratch their bodies and did not touch the food with their fingers when they ate, again using sticks to transfer the food from the container to their mouths.

At the end of their confinement, the vine hammocks they used while they were on the raid, along with the scratching sticks, were taken out of the village and tied to a particular kind of tree. The hammocks were placed about 6 feet above the ground and separated from each other by about 1 foot. After this was done, the men resumed their normal activities.

Kąobawä felt that he had satisfied his obligation to avenge Damowä's death. The Monou-teri, however, wanted to prosecute the war further and continue raiding. It was at this point that Paruriwä of Kąobawä's group began to emerge as one of the more prominent men in the village. He stepped forward and actively prosecuted the war against the Patanowä-teri, encouraged by the esteem in which the Monou-teri held him. Still, he was not enthusiastic enough for the Monou-teri. On one raid he subsequently led, he elected to turn back and go home when the Patanowä-teri were not found at their main garden. The Monou-teri insisted that the party should continue on until they

[3] The canoe was hidden in the brush by Kąobawä's son-in-law, who lives in a village up the Orinoco. He had come to Bisaasi-teri that day to visit and hid his canoe so that the Bisaasi-teri would not borrow it.

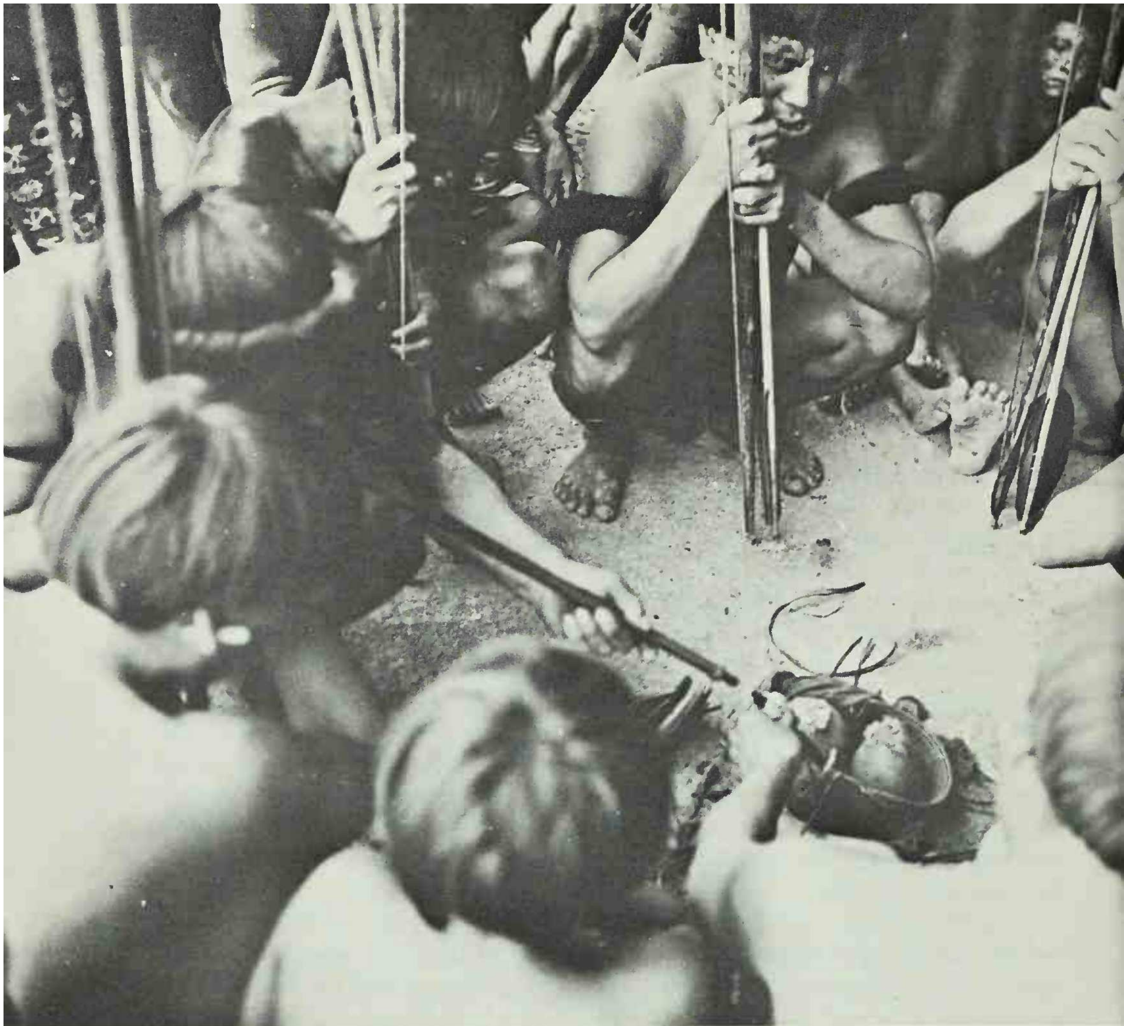

Fig. 5–4. Blowing drugs (ebene) *on the pulverized bones of Damowä, slain Monou-teri headman.*

located the enemy, but Paruriwä refused to go any further. When he turned back, so did the entire party.

The Monou-teri and Bisaasi-teri raided against the Patanowä-teri six times while I lived with them, and each time the preparations for the raid closely followed the description given above. The Monou-teri returned to their producing site only when the jungle was inundated; only at that time could they exist without the support of their allies. The remainder of the year they had to take refuge with members of allied villages or expose themselves to the risk of being attacked by superior forces by remaining in their own producing garden.

The Monou-teri also raided the Patanowä-teri without aid from their allies. One of the raids was conducted near the end of the rainy season, and I was staying in their village at the time the raid was held.

A special ceremony took place the day before the raid. The gourds containing the ashes of the slain Damowä were put on the ground in front of his brother's house.

Everyone in the village gathered around the ashes and wept aloud. The bamboo quiver of the dead man was brought to the gourds, smashed, the points taken out, and the quiver itself burned. While this was going on, the mourners were in a state of frenzy, pulling at their hair and striking themselves, screaming and wailing. One of his brothers took a snuff tube and blew some of the drug into the gourds containing the ashes (see Fig. 5–4). The tube was then cut in half, one of the dead man's arrow points being used to measure the point at which the snuff tube was cut. I was never able to determine whether the arrow points taken from the quiver were possessions of the dead man or were, in fact, the points removed from his body. There were ten of them, and my informants were too touchy about the matter to be questioned in detail: I received affirmative nods to both questions. In any event, the ten bamboo points were distributed to the raiders, who fondled them and examined them carefully. Each man brought one with him on the raid that followed this ceremony. The severed snuff tube and the gourds of ashes were wrapped in leaves and put back in the thatch of the brother's house.

That night I think I became emotionally close to the Yąnomamö for the first time. I remained in my hammock and gave up collecting genealogies. As darkness fell Damowä's brothers began weeping in their hammocks. I lay there and listened, not bothering to tape record it or photograph it or write notes. One of the others asked me why I was not making a nuisance of myself as usual, and I told him that my innermost being (*buhii*) was cold—that is, I was sad. This was whispered around the village, and as each person heard it, he looked over at me. The children who inevitably accumulate around my hammock were told by their elders to go home and not bother me anymore. I was *hushuo,* in a state of emotional disequilibrium, and had finally begun to act like a human being as far as they were concerned.

The next day the raiders lined up, shouted in the direction of the Patanowä-teri, heard the echo come back, and left the village to collect their provisions and hammocks. I allowed them to talk me into taking the entire raiding party up the Mavaca River in my canoe. There, they could find high ground and reach the Patanowä-teri without having to cross the numerous swamps that lay between the two villages. There were only ten men in the raiding party, the smallest the war party can get and still have maximum effectiveness. As we traveled up the river, the younger men began complaining. One had sore feet, and two or three others claimed to have malaria. They wanted to turn back because I had forgotten to bring my malaria pills with me as I had promised. Hukoshikuwä (Fig. 5–5), a brother of the slain headman, silenced their complaints with an angry lecture on cowardice. I let them all out at the mouth of a stream they intended to follow. They unloaded their seemingly enormous supply of plantains and politely waited for me to leave. I sat among them and chatted, thinking that they were doing essential tasks as they fiddled with arrows and retied their provisions. Finally, one of them hinted that I should be leaving because I had a long trip and might not get home before dark. It was then that I discovered they were dallying, trying to be polite to me. They all thanked me for taking them upstream in my canoe, the only time Yąnomamö ever expressed gratitude to me, and I got in my canoe to leave. Hukoshikuwä came down to untie my rope for me and shove me off the bank. He watched, silently, as my canoe got caught up in the current and drifted away. He looked frightened, reluctant, anxious, but determined. After I had gotten my motor started and was under way, I looked back to see him turn, pick up his plantains and weapons, and disappear into the jungle. Even

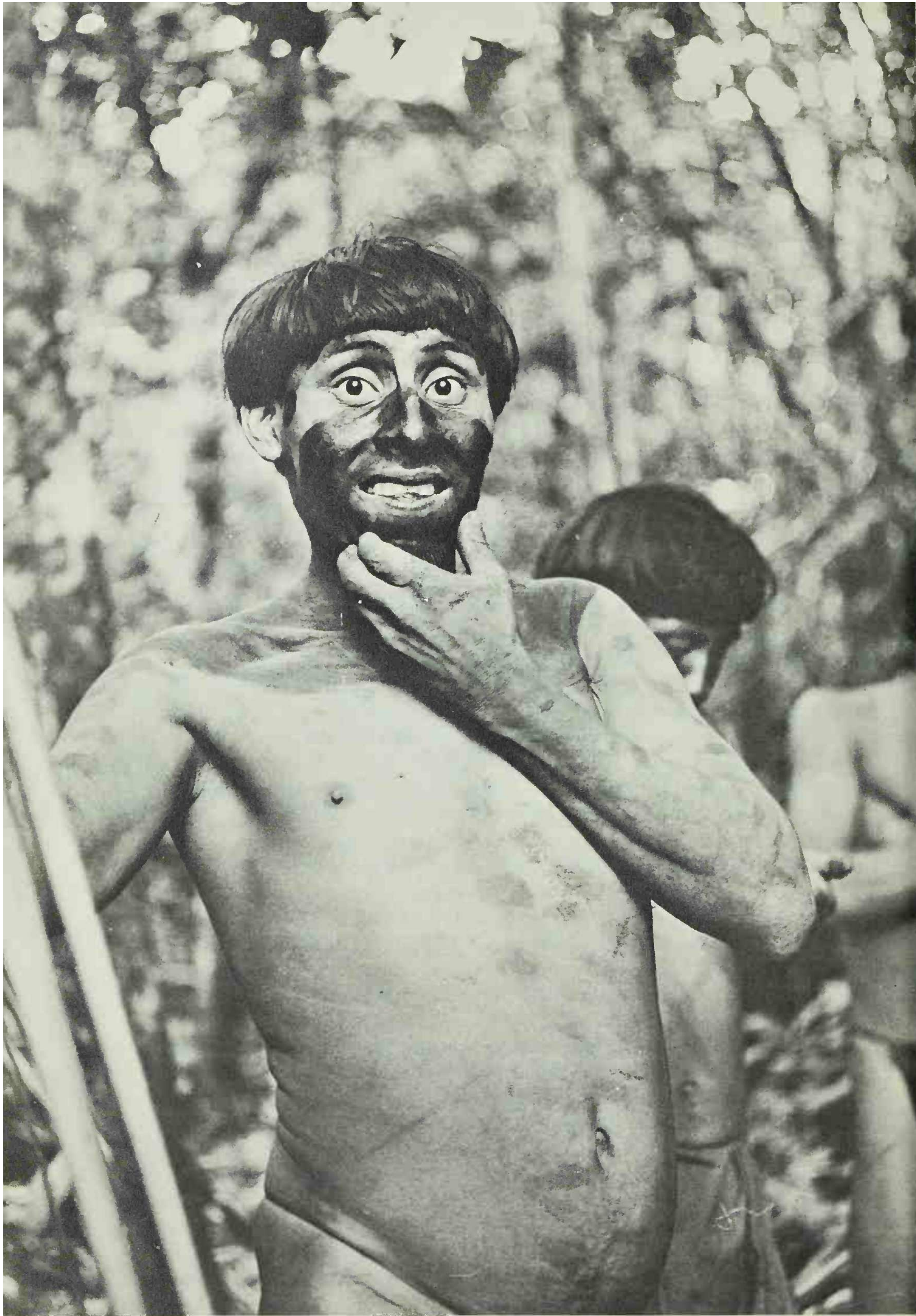

Fig. 5-5. Hukoshikuwä leading a raiding party against the Patanowä-teri.

he was not enthusiastic about going on the raid, despite the fact that he lectured the younger members of the raiding party about their overt reluctance and cowardice. He was older, however, and had to display the ferocity that adult men are supposed to show. In short, although Hukoshikuwä probably had very little desire as an individual to participate in the raiding, he was obliged to do so by the pressures of the entire system. He could ill afford to remain neutral, as his very own kinsmen–even Kąobawä–implied by word and action that it was disgusting for him not to avenge the death of his brother; and some of his kinsmen in other villages openly accused him of cowardice for not chasing the raiders when they shot Damowä. Again, his erstwhile allies, when they complained about having to feed him and his relatives, were blunt and discourteous. The Shamatari allies even managed to demand a number of women from Hukoshikuwä's group in payment for girls they had given them earlier, when the Monou-teri were superordinate in the alliance pecking order. In short, if Hukoshikuwä failed to put on a show of ferocity and vindictiveness, it would not be long before his friends in allied villages would be taking even greater liberties and demanding more women. Thus, the system worked against him and demanded that he be fierce. Since his own group was small, it had to protect its sovereignty even more rigorously, or be absorbed by a greedy ally whose protection would be tendered at the price of women.

Hukoshikuwä and his raiders did not locate the Patanowä-teri on this raid, although they searched for over a week. They knew it would be difficult to find them in the rainy season, largely because they would have to take many detours around impassable swamps. It was with this in mind that they brought their larger-than-usual supply of plantains.

The war was still being conducted, but on a lesser scale, when I returned to Monou-teri a year later. They had managed to kill two Patanowä-teri and abduct two women. The Patanowä-teri only killed one Monou-teri, the headman. Hence, the Monou-teri, at least for the time being, came out ahead. The Patanowä-teri will not cease raiding them until they kill at least one more Monou-teri, but then the Monou-teri will be obliged to avenge this death when it occurs.

There will probably be a respite to the raiding because the Patanowä-teri group fissioned and subsequently lost a significant fraction of their numbers. The Monou-teri have completed their move to the new garden and now live there. If the raiding stops, they will be able to live alternatively between their two gardens at any season. Otherwise, they can only occupy their old site in the peak of the wet season. Having two gardens makes them more independent of their allies, and they can again be aggressive in their political dealings with them. Since they have exchanged women with one of their Shamatari allies and are now living only a half-day's journey from them, they most likely will bind their political fate to the fate of this ally. Their relationships to the two Bisaasi-teri groups, on the other hand, will probably grow cool. Already, the Monou-teri have taken sides with their Shamatari allies in club fights against the Upper Bisaasi-teri, and they still resent the fact that the Lower Bisaasi-teri forcefully took one of the abducted Patanowä-teri women away from them. Despite the fact that the Monou-teri share a common history and common blood with the two Bisaasi-teri groups, they are now entering into a political situation that frequently leads such related groups to mutual hostilities.