"YOUNG BILL'S HAPPY DAYS"
REMINISCENCES OF RURAL AUSTRALIA
1910-1915

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Introduced, edited and annotated by
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Chapter 16

NORTHERN TERRITORY HERE WE COME

Young Bill and his inseparable bush mate Harry Jones (Southern Irishman and loyal "senfenyen" [Sinn Fenian] to boot, alias "Long Jonsey", arrived in Longreach after leaving Bimbah station several weeks after the new year of 1914, and definitely on their way to the (then) little known Northern Territory via Townsville and Darwin. (As a matter of fact it was still very much referred to as Palmerston.) They had been well advised not to arrive there before the wet season, which could last any time between say early November, and go on until the end of March or even April, according as to whether it was a "long" or "short" wet.

The Lads worked matters out, and realising they had ample time, they thought they would prefer Cobb and Co.'s coach to Winton, rail to Townsville (which place Harry had not yet seen), thence steamer to Darwin, or Palmerston as it was often referred to those days, even in states other than the Northern Territory itself. The Mates preferred this route rather than catching the "rattler" direct from Longreach for Rockhampton on the coast, and steamer north from there.

The train was boarded one Sunday morning at Winton, and the trip down to Townsville proved a regular picnic. Plenty of beer and spirits were obtainable at the towns the train passed through, and it was surprising how many of the passengers availed themselves of the opportunity of
getting anything from mildly happy drunk, and some through all stages until becoming a cot case, stretching themselves out on the floor and sleeping it off. Passing through the rolling Mitchell grass downs country (not to be confused with the Darling Downs) the line being unfenced for the most part, the train would have to pull up occasionally whilst the crew and some of the passengers hunted the stock off the line; and sometimes they took some hunting off, many mobs being so used to the procedure (mostly sheep in this country of course) that they just had to be pushed off. There was much picnicking by the wayside, even at times to the equivalent of boiling the billy by obtaining boiling water from the engine crew, who were generally handed a couple of bottles of beer or even "a few bob".

However, the rattler arrived at Townsville the following morning, and the Lads got settled in the pub opposite the station, where Young Bill and Harry Leper had boarded prior to their trip out west after their cane cutting tour some year or so earlier. A call at Burns Philp's offices confirmed what had already been learnt from yarning blokes at the pub, that there would be a steamer calling in on her way to Singapore via Darwin "in a few days". This suited the lads, as they wanted a bit of a loaf round Townsville, and also had some shopping to do.

They got rid of their stock-whips which were becoming a little too worn (a second-hand dealer of course). The boys had no intention of being taken as new chums on arrival up north, and so they bought good stock-whips, but not new. They had their well-worn concertina riding leggings and elastic-sided high-heeled riding boots, but invested in a

1"Phillips", here and elsewhere, in the original.
new pair of the latter each as they had often been warned that these things were very dear up north. Harry already had one well-worn pair of riding breeches but invested in a couple of new pair, and he also secured a fresh set of spurs; but he was one of those fellows that could get away with what a quieter chap, like his mate, just couldn't, or anyway wouldn't try to. So Bill was satisfied with his old set of spurs (which he wore without spiked rouls: "hooks", as they were often called out there those days). Bill took over his mate's old riding breeches, but also invested in a new pair too. He just didn't like the idea of appearing up north in new ones, he'd try the old well-worn pair for a start. The Lads had their two repeating rifles, points 32 and 44, and all reloading tools, but no revolvers, which from all accounts were going to be a necessity up north. One could walk into any hardware shop those days and buy any firearms at all, and no questions asked, but the lads wanted "old stuff". Harry got onto a .44 that had seen much use, with well-worn holster, belt and supporting shoulder strap complete. Lighter calibre revolvers were also purchased, .32s (not so light). But the boys had been advised to secure heavy sixshooters, something one could "bring a bullock down with at short range from the saddle".

However, Young Bill got his chance later at a second-hand shop on Thursday Island. It was a wicked looking thing, and was old and worn enough to have shot a dozen men in its time: could have told a tale no doubt could it have spoken, Young Bill couldn't help thinking. Just what he wanted, and only thirty shillings: a .36 (if "Old" Bill remembers correctly), just a little lighter than Harry's .44. The one eighth Jap., one quarter Chinese and the balance Malay and Aboriginal proprietor, was also able to sell Bill a couple of hundred rounds of ammo and suitable well-worn holster etc.. Incidentally, this souvenir was one of the few Bill took back to Sydney with him some year or so...
later when on his way to enlist for the war via Sydney, where he could also see his people again after an absence of four and a half years. Incidentally again, returning from the war four years later, Bill was disappointed to find his old souvenir of the North had disappeared. The reason of the gun's "walking" was eventually ascertained by Bill, and strangely enough it went back up North again when Young Bill's Dad and his notorious Uncle Bert (Master Marine Diver) backed a gold prospector who knew where there was "tons of it" in Arnhem Land, Northern Territory. But apparently the project came to nothing, as Bill's Dad remained dumb on the subject. Well, the two Mates did get a kick out of this shopping in Townsville, they were like a couple of kids and as "happy as Larry".

In the meantime two fares were booked, second saloon for Darwin, per Burns Philps' S.S. Mataram, by a turn of luck due in a few days. Otherwise the tourists may have waited even weeks for a contact with the North.

The sea trip to Darwin was a pleasure, very little rough weather or seasickness. The passengers, not many of them, were mostly government bureaucrats returning to the North after leave in the cities of the South. The higher caste of these "bureaus" as they were generally referred to by the likes of our Young Bill and Harry Jones' group, travelled top saloon of course, dining with the captain and officers of the ship: kept themselves rather aloof from the "outsiders". However the latter were not much worried about this state of affairs, regarding them, mostly anyway, as "bludgers" on the country's taxpayers, and as a matter of fact thinking back over the bureaucratic snobs of the North, Old Bill still thinks the vulgar sobriquet mentioned just about fitted most of them, and continued so for at least a couple of decades whilst the Federal Government who shortly before had taken over from South
Australia, poured out millions of pounds in an endeavour to develop the North; experiments from laying out tens of thousands of pounds clearing the jungle on the Daly River and other places, in an extremely futile effort to grow vegetables and southern crops and fruits, dairying, pig raising etc., etc., on a commercial basis. It was the joke of the North, one of the big experiment projects producing only one giant pumpkin, and then the area was allowed to fall away back again to the ever fiercely contesting jungle. Even at that, the grandfather of a pumpkin was "pinched by a gang of jokers", its remains being found later in the scrub, not so far away.  

There was steerage accommodation (or third class) on the Mataram of course, for the convenience of travelling folk including a few Chinese, and an odd white deadbeat or beachcomber. However, Young Bill and Harry Jones "cottoned" on to a couple of buffalo shooters and two prospector mates who had been holidaying for a few weeks down South. The former had apparently had too good a time while it lasted (the money) and were forced back North in consequence of the want of same, a few weeks earlier than the commencement of the dry. The prospectors had gone South from New Guinea some months earlier to shake off the malaria fever the whites always cont[r]acted over there (New Guinea) sooner or later; but they hadn't quite got rid of it, and looked pale, shaky and ill at times. Anyway they were off back up North again, and planned to earn some "dough" to carry on the good work of looking about for gold in Arnhem Land. They'd got on to something verbally, "only what they'd 'eard" of course.

Well, distant fields look green. Arnhem Land was unknown country

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2See Hill, The Territory, pp.275-76.
those times, only a few gold and other mineral prospectors and adventurers had penetrated the bad fever and dangerous "nigger country", some of them not getting back at all; just relaxed their vigilance a little in looking about all the time for the danger and in the end were caught off guard, and speared or tomahawked to death. Yes, every stray white about old Palmerston "knew where the stuff was", somewhere in Arnhem Land, but warned it was too dangerous to go in after it, unless the party was strong enough numerically to run a well-armed guard all the time; and so the prospectors, the Lads' shipmates, were beginning to realise this state of affairs, and planned to get round the danger as already explained, by organising a strong well-armed party, or otherwise leave the game alone. It took a little money to organise such a syndicate.

The four people comprising the group the Lads palled up with, the two buffalo shooters "Long Jack" and "Nugget Jack", and the two prospectors, Arthur, sometimes called "Long Mow" for obvious reasons, and his mate Dick, a quiet chap, were of the best type of bushmen to mix with. As usual nearly all of them drank too heavily, but whisky was supposed to be a good deterrent for malaria anyhow; or was it a case of the wish being father to the thought? These fellows were say from thirty to middle-age, experienced and wise in all matters appertaining to the North. They were reciprocal in their appreciation of the "young fellows'" interest in all they had to relate of their experiences, and the latter learnt much of the new country they were shortly to arrive at.

Young Bill and Harry had also built up the social amenities stocks back in Townsville: new set of boxing gloves and several mouth organs each, as they had learnt on good authority that they were bound to be scarce up North. No, this information didn't only come from the
salesman, although he did handle his customers well that sunny morning in Townsville: two keen sociable young fellows seemingly well cashed up, off to the Northern Territory, and they were letting the world know all about their plans. However, the gloves were brought out and the Lads started the ball rolling. It was a popular idea right from the start, and the gloves on such occasions would go round anything up to half a dozen contestants. Some would coast along steadily (as Young Bill and Harry generally did) and some, a few, would get carried away and bore in, just about making a fight of it. It was discovered that Jack McCraken, the tall buffalo shooter, was an artist at this game, and played with the lot of them, unless they wanted it otherwise.

The mouth organs had always been popular amongst such company, and they went over well too. There was only one hitch to the latter, everyone wanted to borrow and have a blow themselves; all sorts, blokes that cleaned their teeth twice a day and didn't smoke (remember, the Lads by some strange fluke were non-smokers), to beery old fellows that shaved once a fortnight and cut the strongest black tobacco from the plug, drank plenty of rum and never cleaned their teeth in their lives. And so the Lads had gone thoroughly into this matter and worked out a plan where one could lend them a "mouthy" without running the risk of contracting bubonic plague or worse, and also without hurting the poor brutes' finer feelings. The plan worked this way: always have an old one handy for lending purposes. "Sorry, I happen to be a non-smoker, the taste of tobacco makes me sick. But hold on, here's a mouthy I only use when I waylay [?] this one," "this one" being the instrument the artist is then using. But there was a couple of flaws in the plan: having to put up with the awful grind that now issued from the borrowing artist's instrument, and one had to be very careful not to be caught out if the requesting borrower turned out to be a non-smoker. Sometimes a
risk was taken in this case, or a little quick thinking if one didn't care to take a risk. However, the plan worked pretty good.

The buff. shooters in particular knew all there was to be then known about Arnhem Land, they'd pretty well shot from one end of it to the other over the previous few years. They hadn't much to point out whilst crossing the top stretch of the "Gulf" (of Carpentaria) out of sight of land between Thursday Island and the north-east of Arnhem Land, but on the voyagers getting abreast of the latter country (it could be observed now and again off the port side to South) the Lads' new acquaintances were able and willing to point out different landmarks, generally with some "earthy" tales and anecdotes: such and such a lugger (pearling and beach-de-mere or trepang gatherers and traders) were all massacred by the niggers in the mouth of a river beyond that point or, "A mob of Malays (trading as mentioned above) were ambushed ashore in that bay, see the white sand gleaming, and most of them massacred before regaining their 'prow' (Malay equivalent of a lugger)." And "last night we passed Jim Campbell's country," where he had been living with his family and some myall nigger acquaintences for years, after being out-lawed for outrageous cattleduffing over Victoria River way, and at last caught red-handed by manager Dicky Townshend of the Big Run, Victoria River Downs. However, the Northern Territory police closed in on him as they thought, but Jim was too smart for them: he disappeared entirely. But they arrested one of his gins and compelled her as they thought, to track and sense Jim out.

The police reckoned she knew where Jim was anyway, but if she did she never told. But she did lead the man-hunters into terrible rough and

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3The word "and" is here omitted.
difficult country to the north (meanwhile Jim was travelling east at top speed for Arnhem Land) and then confessed she couldn't lead them (the police) any further, volunteering the surmise that Jim and his gin "Nellie" and family had disappeared up into the clouds. The police then realised they had fallen for a decoy, planted by the man they were after. It was on record, the buff. shooters assured the listening company including our heroes (and some of the company, old hands up North, knew all about the tale) that the man-hunters in this case must have felt murderous toward the decoy, but refrained from taking it out on her. Had she been a "buck" nigger, it easily could have been otherwise.

However, nemesis caught up with Jim after a few years, and he was eventually speared to death (shovel-nosed spears at that) in a very remarkable murder. The nigger who planned the killing had had a little contact with whites, and had cause (genuine or otherwise) to harbour a grudge against Jim Campbell (although on the whole the latter got on well with the blacks), and keeping out of the dirty work himself, this "little bit educated nigger" sooled an adjacent tribe on to attack the white man, and these tribesmen stalked their quarry patiently, and eventually catching him off guard adjacent to thick mangrove scrub, wormed their way between Jim and his guns. It was not until this happened that the police caught up with outlawed Jim Campbell. The law went out and managed to arrest some of Jim's murderers, including the real instigator who had "egged" them on. The actual murderers got several years gaol in Fanny Bay Gaol (a real holiday for them), but the real culprit (the "little bit civilised boy") got off scot-free. Jim was speared and buried near the mouth of the King River. "Probably one

4"having" in original.
of the world's loneliest graves," submitted Long Jack the taleteller, and the listening company agreed it probably was. More about the trial of the spearers later on. The Lads often heard of the then late Jim Campbell and his doughty deeds, in many a drover's and otherwise camp.⁵

But to hark back a little in the adventures of our heroes; the tale has got a little ahead of itself. The Mates were a little disappointed on voyaging north from Townsville, with the islands bordering the Whitsunday Passage, which meanders between the Great Barrier Reef and the Queensland coast.⁶ They expected to observe many picturesque tropical isles, veritable flat oases studded with thousands of palms and surrounded by magnificent sandy beaches. However there were very few measuring up to these expectations, although they, the islands, were more inclined to be that way the further north the tourists travelled. But for the most part, the islands were more or less mountain tops sticking out of the sea and sometimes rather bare looking, spacious areas being just bare grass, and until the Travellers approached well north, forests of some variety of pine similar to cyprus covered a fair area of their surface. Not so much tropical jungle, which the Lads expected to see aplenty.

The tropical wet season being in full swing (toward the end of February), more and more squally rain and overcast skies were encountered, which sometimes dulled the spirits of the two adventurers,

⁵Lavender's memory may have been refreshed by reading Hill's account of Campbell's adventures in The Territory, pp.324-43.

⁶Since the Whitsunday Passage is south-east of Townsville, Lavender is either confusing the islands with others to the north, or mistakenly recalling his passing of the islands on the way from Rockhampton to Bowen earlier in the trip.
but not for long. The company of the northern bushmen they were in with was nearly always cheerful, under any circumstances. Back at Thursday Island the Mates had their first view of a pearling fleet at anchor. All luggers, two masted fore and aft rigged, decked in and bulwarked sailing boats of say ten to fifteen tons. Mostly manned by Japanese divers, and the rest of the crew would be all the colours of the rainbow and from all crosses, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, to Chinese and Malays. However the fleet had been laid up since the beginning of the wet, some time toward the end of November, and would not sail off pearl hunting again till the end of the wet, some time in March/April.

Coming on toward Darwin (off to port of course), it was commented on that one of the first northern outposts was formed thereabouts back in the eighteen forties by rum corps redcoats and convicts, the idea being to forestall the French who were suspected those days of planning settlement along the Northern Australian coast. However, the settlement was abandoned after a very few years. Apparently all that could be seen of the old settlement in 1915 was a few piles of crumbling bricks, an odd fruit tree, and a pathetic little God's Acre, and all overgrown by the jungle. Most of the few graves are unmarked, but it was explained there was a tombstone there commemorating the burial of an officer's wife and child, and a couple of minor headstones: a pathetic relic of some of the earliest pioneers. The settlement was called Port Essington.

Next, and off to starboard, came the large Melville Island and the smaller one Bathurst Island, separated by the narrow Apsley Strait. Way back in 1824 the very first settlement in the North was formed on the larger island near the ocean end of the strait, and for the same reason as the Essington Settlement, and of redcoats and convicts. It was called Port [Fort] Dundas. This was abandoned after a few years,
several of its people having been killed and wounded by the blacks, and still more died of fever. And so it was left to the original inhabitants and the fiercely contesting jungle, as were the next two attempts at settlement on the mainland.  

However, it was explained with much gusto by our Heros' friends that Melville Island now sustained a herd of approximately ten thousand wild buffaloes, and the "king" of the island was champion buff. shooter Joe Cooper who had been there many years, his brother having been speared to death there some years back, and Joe himself badly wounded. The Lads had the good luck to meet this champion buffalo shooter in due course, but more about this matter anon.

Incidentally, [it] was also related, the genesis of the buffalo herds all over the Territory and how they had bred up from a few domestic buffaloes imported from Timor to help the people of these earliest settlements in their pioneering work, the beasts being eventually turned loose to fend for themselves in the jungle on the settlement being abandoned, and a few had already (like Governor Arthur Phillip's cattle at Port Jackson some half century earlier) escaped to the jungle, anyway.

Today, 1964, it is estimated there are any number up to a million head throughout the North, bred up over a little more than a hundred years from the original very few.

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7 The Melville Island settlement was established in 1824 under Captain J.J.G. Bremer, and abandoned in 1829. A second settlement was made at Raffles Bay on the Cobourg Peninsula in 1827, and this in turn was abandoned in 1829. The Port Essington settlement lasted from 1838 to 1849. Peter G. Spillett, Forsaken Settlement. An Illustrated History of the Settlement of Victoria, Port Essington, North Australia, 1839-1839, (Landsdowne, Melbourne, 1972). See also Donovan, A Land Full Of Possibilities, pp.13-25.
Chapter 17

DARWIN (OR OLD PALMERSTON)

Some couple of hours later Port Darwin was entered on a not too bad day for the wet season, alternating in showers, sunshine and overcast skies. A fine large harbour apparently, the foreshores on the port side quite picturesque with timbered low cliffs and white sandy beaches. Turning eastward around a point, there was the long high wharf a few hundred yards away, and the town on top of the high cliff behind it.

The Lads put up at the Club Hotel along with their new Mates (the pub with the "tree of knowledge" growing in front of it, a fair sized banyan). The "silvertails" (or "bludgers") went to the only other hotel in Darwin, the Victoria, which apparently catered for that class. Evidently too the latter was a hotbed of snobbery, mostly bureaucrats who kept to themselves like their kind on the S.S. Mataram as earlier explained, much to the derision and amusement of the likes of the Lads and their companions.

Well, it seemed the wet was expected to lift early, but there would be a few weeks yet. But nobody worried, except that anyone at any time could go down with dengue fever, which was a mild form of malaria. The Mates took good advice and obtained a good supply of quinine, and occasionally dosed themselves as a preventative. For the rest, the company loafed, slept, smoked, read and played cards, strolled about town in between showers, but mostly just lolled about under the verandah or the "tree of knowledge" as the weather took up, and yawned.
It was once more confirmed to Young Bill that an unusual proportion of bushmen had a native gift of tale-telling and could continue entertainingly for hours and day after day, without unduly repeating themselves. And weren't they just worth listening to. The Lads learnt the unofficial history of the Territory inside and out during the next few weeks, and some of it was pretty grim. Only the merest rumour of certain happenings ever reaching the southern papers: such matters as wholesale and individual shooting of the blacks (or "niggers" as they were always referred to those days) and ruthless acquiring of their women. Most old-timers kept quiet about these happenings, or toned them down considerably. Others had a lot to say about them, sometimes actually skiting of their conduct in such affairs, which really amounted to criminal brutality, rape and sheer murder. (Of course some of these skites and loose talkers exaggerated a great deal, but that wasn't saying much in their favour.) The Lads, being young and new to the North, were secretly a little upset over this state of affairs, but it seemed that one could easily make themselves unpopular by remonstrating against these prevailing customs, and the new arrivals found it hard at times to control their outward disgust at a minimum. It seemed, at least outwardly, that nobody was expected to have any feelings but contempt for the niggers, including mixed bloods also for the most part, and the minority (and of course there were a few whites who felt keenly about the very raw deal the "nigs" were getting generally), but kept their dinkum opinions to themselves. The Lads noticed that the only outrageous crime against the blacks (only too popular in early pioneering days down South) that had not been practised up North (or only to a minor degree comparatively) was that of poisoning the "Abos" by mixing arsenic with their flour, by which means the victims died a terrible and agonising death. But all this was some of the dark side of the early Territory, and the tail end of these customs were still dying hard.
Incidentally, there was an ugly account of a wholesale "shoot-up raid" out in the Territory adjacent to a Coniston station (some two or three hundred miles north-westerly from Alice Springs), brought to light by the Southern press about the late twenties. An "Official" enquiry was held. But, like the Ku-Klux-Klan of America's Deep South, the Northern Territory settlers out there could not be induced to "talk", and nothing came of the enquiry, the affair was practically "glossed over". About thirty-five or forty blacks were shot, but those responsible were entirely exonerated: it was found that the shootings were justified. Only two whites were killed! But anybody of the necessary experience of similar such happenings knew that it was highly probable that there was a great deal of truth in the allegations, and quite likely yet another unnecessary wholesale slaughter of the blacks had occurred. Officially and semi-officially, something like forty deaths were involved in this latter day shooting up, all Aborigines and mixed bloods of course, but only two whites "murdered" (previous to the general shooting). And it could have been in effect retaliation for the "murder" of these two white men, in which case the surrounding settlers would jump on the band wagon to get even with the local nuisance, that is, wild myalls who would not, for the most part, submit tamely to the loss of their hunting grounds, the means of their subsistence, and become the generally degenerate slaves of their morally (at least) unlawful conquerors, but had the temerity to spear and stampede the white man's cattle, and the former too if the chance arose.¹

Anybody interested enough in this dark phase of Australia's history knows the Aborigines were often to blame in deliberate bloody onslaughts

against the settlers, killing also any women and children whilst they were about it. And if it could be overlooked that the settlers had forcefully deprived them of their own morally lawful country, desecrating their ancient sacred ritual grounds, and worse, in the process (it has already been mentioned ref. the loss of means of livelihood), they, the original inheritors of the country, "attacked the whites, their exterminators" for "no reason at all except the lust for killing and acquiring the victims coveted possessions": or so the whites submitted. Yes, there was (and still is) two sides to the question. The whites were not always the ones guilty of terrible life-taking and shameful slave-driving, but if some means could have been devised to acquire more and more of the Aborigines' country and compensate them in some humane and equitable way, no doubt there would have been less spearing and killing of the settlers, and certainly much less shooting up of the original inhabitants. But this humane idea was up to a century and a half off (as far as Australia was concerned) and meantime every "new" country in the world was practising settlement by the unjust and harsh manner referred to, and one cannot read of the matter (without over prejudice one hopes) and not be convinced that, on the whole, the British were the more humane in their dealings with the natives of newly acquired countries.

But we are getting right away from our story. Anyway, at the time Young Bill and Long Jonsey arrived at Darwin, 1913,\(^2\) it was accepted as a fact (and it was a fact) that the Australian Aboriginals as a race were dying out fast, and would soon be no more: the former part of that contention was quite true. Happily the latter part has been disproved, commencing some two or three decades back, and gathering momentum with

\(^2\)All other references indicate that it was early 1914.
time. Old Bill, reviewing in retrospect the whites' regard for the "niggers" at the period discussed, the Lads' arrival at Darwin, it seems it was somewhat on a par with the treatment of the "gippoes" of Egypt by the Aussies some two years later: get all the fun out of them possible, and if the "mob" was broke, upset Abdul's barrow of oranges and all hands help themselves to buckshee, and at other times slap them, the gippoes, elaborately on the back and give them some "buckshee" (as backsheesh was soon pronounced by the "Aussie Tourists") etc., etc.. But we must get away from abstract matters and return to our direct story again.

The town of Darwin was buzzing with rumours. Big things were doing for the Territory in the shape of substantial capital coming in from overseas per Swift Bros (or the "Bovril People"), whoever they were, but apparently they were a powerful factor in "cattle world" matters. They were ("mulga wire" insisted) "buying up huge areas of cattle country comprising a chain of stations, and surveyors had already been busy plotting out a giant freezing works in the jungle two or three miles from town." Old hands were a little skeptical about all this surmise. There had already been several attempts to develop the Territory, and just as many failures with "millions poured down the sink". However, all hands were convinced there was something doing. Darwin was occupied by a cosmopolitan population of a fair number of Asian peoples in the ratio of perhaps twenty or thirty to one European (or decendants of same). Of the Asians the Chinese would easily be the most numerous nationality, only outnumbered by the Aborigines, full bloods and otherwise.³

³Though Darwin had a large Asian population by Australian standards, Lavender's figures are exaggerated. In 1911, 430 (about 40%) of Darwin's 1,082 inhabitants were Asian-born. Australia, Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1911, Vol.II, p.382.
There was some gambling going on amongst the Chinese all the time, in the way of lotteries called "fantan" and "pack-a-poo". The whites dabbled in this pastime and sometimes won a few shillings or a couple of pounds. The games were illegal, but apparently the police had a dabble themselves occasionally. A few Jap divers and coloured pearler crews kept much to themselves in a "chow dive", just a large shed of a room, where shoulder to shoulder and like sardines they camped on their cane fabric mats, and used a communal open fireplace down one end of the room. The semi-civilised Abos amongst the crews stuck to the luggers throughout the wet, and never seemed to be ashore. They could be observed lounging about the small boats, generally quite naked.

A few local Abos strolled the streets, including increpit beggars and some fine built quiet and moody (or brooding) males ("bucks") also. But most of the Aborigine population seemed to be camped or moved about in the scrub and bush adjacent to the town. At night they could be heard in corroboree, quiet and subdued enough, mostly in small groups, chanting their strange and fascinating "songs", in their own dialect of course, accompanied by much thigh slapping and boomerang clapping etc..4

Some of the shop walls of the town were decorated with various Aborigine weapons, tools, "'didgees" and "bull roarers" (the last two items being musical(?) instruments), also including some very large heavily barbed spears, highly coloured in ochre of red, yellow, black and white. The Lads later observed some of these huge ceremonial spears among the Groote Eylandt blacks, in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Prominent also, were some fine "spreads" of polished and mounted buffalo horns.

Incidentally, the Mates saw plenty of these later too, but in a much less peaceful environment.

Some feelings of loneliness were now experienced at times, a sense of being cut off from the rest of the world. Coastal steamers from the North or South called once in two or three weeks, old southern newspapers could be read, and the local "rag" (Northern Territory Times) came out once a week, and there was telegraphic communication with Adelaide and the South through the Overland Telegraph Line. The environment, especially during the wet, tended to draw or drive people closer together. This "sense of the herd" unconsciously (mostly) depending and "leaning" on others for fellowship and comfort, had of course been previously experienced under somewhat similar circumstances, but not as often or as intensely as "up North". Days and weeks of rain and overcast skies, together with too much inactivity, hence boredom, accentuated this sense of loneliness and isolation whilst "putting in time", waiting for the wet to take up. However, worse was to follow, such as being camped out on the Big Run (Victoria River Downs) with only one other white man (besides oneself) and some half-civilised Aboriginals for company, for weeks and even months on end. But the story is racing ahead again.

Amongst the "old" Territorians the two new arrivals met, was a quiet speaking and dispositioned middle-aged fellow named Frank Dempsey: "Demps" for short. Demps was going down to Victoria River Downs directly the wet broke up, had a big contract to start, the first fencing of any consequence down that way. Some five hundred miles for a start, just a couple of barb wires, posts half a chain apart (adequate enough under the circs for cattle and horses, no sheep down that way). Part of the contract was fencing the boundary between the Big Run and Wave Hill station to the south, up to one hundred and fifty miles in
length, and most of it "straight as a gun barrel". Demps didn't exactly rush the Lads when they felt him out ref. a start on the fencing, and asked a lot of subtle and pertinent questions in reference to same. However, the Lads knew enough about the game to convince Demps they knew quite a little about putting up a line of fence, and had experienced quite a bit of it in Queensland. As a matter of fact he, Dempsey, ended up quite pleased with the idea of picking up a couple of "fencers" of sufficient experience. Nearly every man outside Darwin was either a prospector or a stockman, and as comparatively little fencing had been done, there were very few that knew much about the art; and anyhow the great majority preferred stock work. To many it was regarded almost as a comedown (infra dig) to take on anything in the way of hard work, although sinking a shaft or stock riding could be hard enough work at times. Of course sinking a shaft etc. was a gamble and could lead to quick big money, and stock work was generally easy going enough, so apparently both occupations "got a hold" on most men who had put in much time at either and it became their trade or calling, most of them not caring to change.

The Mates were really not looking for fencing anyway. They had definitely come North for some stock work and a droving trip. But a start at anything for the meantime "down Victoria River way" seemed a good move, and so they were very keen about the job. They considered themselves very lucky of a chance so soon, to get down to the the Big Run, as Victoria River Downs was nearly always referred to. And so it was agreed with Demps that they would start with him in due course on the fencing job, "soon as the wet takes up". Incidentally, the station was supplying most of the plant.

However, after hanging around the town for another couple of weeks and getting thoroughly fed up and a bit melancholy with putting in time
waiting for the wet to lift, came a chance to make a break earlier than expected. Demps put the Mates onto a fellow "from down Kimberley way" (Western Australia) who was in a hurry to get back to his own stamping ground. He owned and skippered a fair sized auxiliary lugger, or rather "boat", with a fairly shallow draught and lifting keel (or fin), and was dumping some cargo up the Victoria River at the Depot. (This was just about first time incidentally, our Travellers ever heard of the Victoria River Depot.) "Captain Kimberley Joe" (surname forgotten if ever mentioned) was an easygoing talkative "sand groper" (West Australian) and pretty near a "combo" it turned out, having just about lived with the Abos along the northern coast of Western Australia since he had to clear out from his fishing occupation "down the bottom end of the state" (it was whispered) for reasons better known to himself. But the North was full of such characters, and nobody asked any questions.

Yes, the Lads could come along and welcome, and it would cost them a fiver each and they could also be expected to lend a hand when necessary, which included standing a watch at night when lying to off bad nigger country: adding significantly, "Got your revolvers of course?" and when answered enthusiastically in the affirmative by the thrillingly intrigued adventurers, he laughed delightedly as if he hadn't forgotten he was a young fellow himself once. "And ind" [sic], he continued, "yer young buggers, keep right off the black velvet (native women) aboard," and changing suddenly from a jovial larrikin to a dour and determined fellow, he finished off, "They're well married, don't want any trouble that way, and mind no booze aboard either. Alright?" The Lads, realising Joe meant the last remarks as definite orders from the captain (or boss: he was never addressed as captain), answered in serious mien that they quite understood the necessity of the conditions imposed. The Mates were not surprised at anything Joe had
remarked on. They had heard all about him and his crew from Demps and the company at the pub. At the same time they realised Joe was no fool, for all his easygoing and jocular demeanour.

It has been forgotten to mention that some little time previous to meeting Kimberley Joe, came a welcome diversion in a way of a steamer from the South. Some welcome mail arrived for the Lads forwarded from central Queensland, and something else: Harry's expected "remittance" to the tune of a couple of hundred pounds, all the way from Waterford, Southern Ireland. Harry's parents were both deceased (his father had been a sea captain) and "later on" he, Harry, was to come in for a "tidy few thou'" along with the rest of the family, when and if they "decided to sell up their invested interests". In the meantime, apparently, Jonsey collected his share now and again, of the interest on capital invested. Not that the money was wanted, the Lads were anything but broke, but as Harry remarked, "Nice to know it's there," and of course his Mate knew by the unwritten law of those parts, it was there also for him should the need arise. The Lads had a mind (the idea under the circs coming from Harry, 'twas his money) to contact their prospector friends "Long Mow" Dick and Arthur ref. a prospecting trip into Arnhem Land. (In the meantime those fellows had taken the railway trip on "Leaping Lena" about one hundred and thirty miles to the terminus at Pine Creek, where work was "doing" on the extension of the line to "the Katherine"). Or alternatively, our optimists thought of getting a buffalo shooters' plant together and going along with "Nugget" and "Long Jack", but these plans were ruled out for the meantime, the Mates would "catch up with same after a droving trip".
Map 3. The Northern Territory.
Kimberley Joe's boat was called the Happy Family: "Motley Family" would have been at least as appropriate! Joe's right-hand man was an intelligent enough coloured fellow, many degrees of colour, but certainly including Abo., Chinese and/or Jap, and white man, and some other shades of the Homo sapiens. He was always called George. The Lads found George on the whole a good fellow, talkative enough and easy to get on with. George knew these coasts and waters very well; a good thing, as Joe didn't, his stamping ground being anywhere around the West Australian coast between Wyndham and anywhere south of Broome. He was what was known as a point to point navigator, seldom losing sight of land, although he had compass etc. set up aboard. It appeared he used the compass occasionally, under favourable circumstances, and when he had to. Naturally Joe leaned heavily on George's knowledge, at least round these parts.

The rest of Joe's crew consisted of Willie and Charlie, two full blood Abos from way round Broome way, and their gins Nellie and Lucy. Since those far off days over half a century back, Young Bill has more than once read what the famous navigator and scientist buccaneer come pirate, William Dampier, has handed down to posterity in the way of his observations toward the end of the seventeenth century, of the above mentioned quartet's ancestors. They were perhaps not quite so ugly as
the folk so described by Dampier, nor their physique so wanting, but when that has been mentioned there is nothing more to be said. However, an outstandingly comely young gin of the same family horde as aboard, as companion cook and more of Joe and George, who shared her equally without any quarelling. Her name was Maggie, and in looks, figure and intelligence, she was far above her compatriots. Joe and George saw to it that their crew bathed and washed twice a day, and kept their meagre garments clean. Their minimum attire was a nagar loin cloth or a short skirt, and they seldom wore anything else. The quartet's quarters were before the foremast where they had rigged some sort of a canvas covering and cooked over a small fire built on a flat receptacle containing sand.

Maggie shared generally, the tiny cabin with Joe and George, and cooked for them and the passengers in the midget galley. Incidentally, under the circs, she was a fair cook. There was one other passenger aboard, a tin prospector named "Dick" returning to the Daly River to rejoin his tin scratching mates after a spell in Darwin where he had been successfully treated for venereal disease: "too much black velvet" he unashamedly explained, adding for the benefit of the young fellows that they "should be very careful, there was plenty of it about" (b.v. and v.d.). The Lads assured Dick they would be careful: they had heard a great deal on this subject under discussion. It appeared it was practised and the consequences risked by the great majority, openly and as the general custom.

Although this was the popular idea of the subject at least fifty years

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1 In 1688 Dampier had described the Australian Aborigines he saw as "the miserablest people in the world."
ago and earlier (ref. sexual relations between whites and Aborigines),
it stuns one a little to remember the then existing state of affairs,
but to ignore the subject would give a very wrong impression of the
"Old" Territory, and as a matter of fact it was part and parcel of the
North. Some people who have never experienced environment[s] other than
cities or comparatively much closer settled parts than the more open and
"cut off" spaces under discussion, may judge hastily and harshly those
isolated and extremely lonely settlers and pioneers of the Territory of
half a century back: there were extenuating circumstances.

There were some very fine men amongst the Territorians, and there was
also a percentage of blackguards too, as usual in similar society, who
cashed in heavily on the custom to the detriment of the Aborigines and
themselves. The Territorians more often than otherwise were many
hundreds of miles from their own women. It was possible to go very many
months and even years without seeing a white woman at all. Isolation
was intense. At times people were up to hundreds of miles from even
very small townships, and the same as regards telephones. Down in the
Victoria River district and other vast areas, there were no telephones
at all. Packhorse mails delivered the goods at six weeks' or six
months' interval, if not prolonged by floods and at other times droughts
etc. Motorcars had not then appeared in the North, and mechanical
transport, wireless, aeroplanes etc. were dreams a long way off.

The above explanations are not meant to be an apology, but they may
help some people to try and imagine themselves in similar environment,
and how they would be likely to react to same ref. the problem under
discussion. And remember, under the circumstances some ninety-five per
cent took the line of least resistance. What would they, the critics,
have done? The very same of course.²

An early morning start was made from Darwin, and it was hoped to make an anchorage the same evening in the mouth of the Daly River, a little over a hundred miles cruising roughly approximate to the southward. However, barely had the harbour been cleared and a southerly course taken, when engine trouble took a hand, and many hours went by before the necessary kick could be got out of the engine to continue. Amidst much activity from George, Charlie and Willie and their women, the sails were got out of the locker forward and bent into position for hoisting; but what wind there was had died down, the weather had become overcast again after one of the few clearing breaks when the sun actually shone (which was supposed to portend the beginning of the end of the wet) and it began to rain. Nevertheless there was enough swell on the sea to cause seasickness to inconvenience the newcomers, who lost interest under the circs, and were glad to shelter under their miserable tarp. covering, the latter state of affairs being quite amusing to the tribesmen from down Broome way, and even George and Joe enjoyed the young fellows' discomforture. Dick however, kept his own council through the Lads' ordeal, admitting later he didn't feel too good himself. Yes, whenever the longshoremen had occasion to hang over the lee side rail, there were raucous howls and loud laughter of amusement from the "boys", and whatever the Lads thought or felt about it, they were wise enough to pretend to laugh with the "nigs", and at themselves too.

At last in the late afternoon the engine was got going, but Joe and

²Broughton makes identical remarks on the subject after his experience in the east Kimberleys in around 1908, Turn Again Home, p.46.
George apparently thought it wise to actually retrace their course a little and snug down for the night in a sheltered fold of Bynoe Harbour. Joe didn't think it necessary to keep a watch here: "The niggers were too close to Darwin; very little risk of thieving, and less of attack." The boys from Broome way would keep sufficient watch without any prompting. It appeared that niggers away from their own country were always very frightened of the local tribesmen in a strange environment, and could be relied on not to be caught napping, and so Joe let the watch look after itself that night. The weather lifted a little about sundown, and after tea the company (less Charlie, Willie and Co.) grouped closely around a specially arranged anti-mosquito smoky fire on the open deck, and listened to the quartet forward enjoying a quiet corroboree with the usual stick- and thigh-tapping: fascinating enough in the particular environment, especially when they quietened down, and the sound of a much stronger corroboree came wafting from down along the shore a mile or so away, where several fires were twinkling.

Dick the prospector seemed the best taleteller, but between the three old-timers there were some rare anecdotes and stories spun. Realising the two newcomers were keen on local history and topography, they were served up with plenty of it; and if the tale lost nothing in the telling, the true facts etc. were sorted out during the following months as the Lads became more "North wise".

It appeared the inlet the Happy Family was anchored in at present was named after Surgeon Bynoe of H.M.S. Beagle, which was round this way
back in the eighteen eighties. The Beagle sailed on a voyage of science and discovery round the world over a period of some five years. Among the scientists aboard was the famous Charles Darwin of Origin of Species, but he was not aboard apparently during this particular Australian visit. Nevertheless, Port Darwin was named for him by Commander Stokes of the Beagle, but in fact Darwin was called Palmerston (and named so in old maps) for many years. The Daly River history was discussed at full length, but some of the facts and figures quoted that night have been corrected in the light of later knowledge over the past half century (the same goes for any similar matters touched on in this narrative). The Daly was a good hundred miles from Darwin, along the coast falling away approximately south-south-west of that port. It was about two miles wide at the entrance, and navigable for shallow draft craft some seventy miles. The "spring tides" could be up over twenty feet, but the river runs fresh after some twenty-five miles up. The wall of water formed by the inrush of the twenty foot tide is called the "bore", and can amount to a rise of feet in a very few minutes. Boatmen are watchful of the bore, and generally pull into a byway to miss the first fierceness of the onrushing tide. The old Copper Landing was up about five miles from the head of navigation, and the mines and disused crusher were a few miles away in the bush. There was also a deserted mission up near the Landing, where the Jesuit Fathers tried unsuccessfully for a few years to civilise and convert the untameable Aborigines, and so it was abandoned and speedily slipped back to the

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jungle. (It is nice to reflect today, 1963, that it is now a prosperous peanut farm, amongst further successful settlement.)

The river was badly infested with man-eating crocodiles, and the natives swim the river with great caution and watchfulness, taking a suitable sharp stick, which they endeavour to use on the brutes by pushing it down their throats or into the eyes. The coast and river Abo are wonderful swimmers, both surface and underwater. Sometimes when attacked by a "croc." (or "'gator" as they were nearly always called up North), they immediately go for the mud bottom and vigorously stir up same, with the idea of limiting the enemy's vision and escaping in the meanwhile. Apparently it's quite successful. Several instances have occurred where the Abo. has actually escaped after the brute's jaws have actually closed on part of his body, and once they take hold they hang on very determinedly, the victim sometimes actually inserting their thumbs or fingers into the 'gator's eyes and exerting pressure: the croc. is apparently very sensitive about the eyes, generally lets go and the victim escapes. There were odd Abo about with terrible scars about them as evidence of croc. fights.

Although all these monsters were nearly always referred to as alligators, there were both crocs and 'gators, the former thriving in the salt tidal waters of the rivers, the latter keeping to the upper fresh water and lagoons beyond the tidal flow. All the crocs were man-eaters, but there were two species of alligator, a small and a larger size. The former are harmless, but the larger type dangerous as the crocs. The crocodile is the more heavily built brute, and lifts its upper jaw in opening its mouth. The 'gator possesses more graceful lines (if such an expression can be used in reference to a monster), and when opening the mouth the bottom jaw moves. There is also a peculiarity between them in the locking of the teeth. Two outsize teeth
in the bottom of the 'gator's jaw protrude outside the top jaws when the mouth is closed, and if anything the 'gator's teeth are inclined the other way from the top jaw. (On the spot knowledge of a half a century back, incidentally; but much more is generally known of our crocs and 'gators, today.)

The copper mines and crusher etc. were about six miles from the Copper Landing, and during the eighties were being worked by some half dozen white men who employed a number of the local tribesmen. One day, suddenly and without warning, the blacks attacked and killed as they thought, all the whites. However, after the niggers had sacked the place and hurriedly cleared out, one of the whites who had been left for dead somewhat revived sufficiently to secure a horse and gallop off for aid, and so saved himself. He carried horrible scars for the rest of his life. Of course terrible retribution was carried out against the Abos, and if one could believe the tales sometimes told by the old hands, any number from ten to twenty, to even a hundred (it varied considerably with the taleteller) blacks were killed for each white man slain. (These killings of the blacks, including poisoning, had been going on occasionally all over Australia since Governor Phillip's landing at Sydney Cove in 1788.) Some of the old hands declared only the bucks were shot, mostly the younger ones, whilst a minority of others reckoned men, women and children were killed indiscriminately, many more or less seriously wounded only, who would endure terrible lingering deaths of course. But apparently this was often the only practical safeguard the whites could resort to at times, just "shoot them out". Sometimes this retaliation by the whites was very badly abused, some unreasonable white blackguards shooting dozens or even hundreds of blacks, and on the slightest pretext.

Primitive retaliation was popular amongst the lonely pioneers, but the
great majority of people throughout the South were out for a fair go for the blacks. These people lived in security and comfort and no danger of stealthy attack, so that it appears that both the great majority who were "safe", and the minority who were not, were prejudiced for or against: but as the South (particularly the cities) every now and again endeavoured to bring the white hunters to heel and the Law, the minority way out back had a clandestine understanding that nobody must "talk". Consequently it was very difficult to compile any evidence against the white hunters. Under such circumstances, one can imagine the rumours and exaggerations that flew round the country, and the more often the tale was told and the further south it travelled, the more jumbled up and exaggerated the story would become.

However, in the case of the Daly River copper mine attack, the great weight of opinion in the North seemed to be that the men who were attacked were in the habit of treating the niggers fairly (no doubt for what it was worth those days) and that there was positively no behaviour toward the blacks that could be used as an excuse for their action. It seems it was one of those well-planned savage attacks (similar to the Barrow Creek onslaught in Central Australia about a decade earlier), just out of savage viciousness for the lust of killing and carrying off the white man's tucker and effects.4

The "Salt Water Tribes" around the estuary of the Daly River were the

4 This incident took place in 1884. Lavender has evidently consulted Alfred Searcy, In Australian Tropics, (George Robertson and Co., London, 1909), pp.241-60, in writing these paragraphs. Hill's The Territory also contains an account, though there are no obvious connections with the typescript. See also Andrew Markus, From The Barrel Of A Gun. The Oppression of the Aborigines 1860-1900, (Victorian Historical Association, West Melbourne, 1974) for an account of the Europeans' response to the killings.
Djerait ("Dejara" in the vernacular), and the Wogait (Worgate), and there were about a dozen tribes and clans (sub-sections) up in the "River Country" behind them. The pronunciation of the native name of the clans or sub-tribes were, naturally, much slurred and shortened in the vernacular. The Daly Country, being a bountiful "tucker" area, was tantamount to it being a populous district, this state of affairs being in direct contrast to vast areas hundreds of miles to the south-west, where one weak tribe would occupy a comparatively vast area of desert (and semi-desert) country.

The Daly River tribes and others adjacent, when they wish it to be known that they come in peace, carry certain branches of flora as a sign of same. They are great adepts at dragging their spears clutched between their toes through the long grass, and so appear unarmed. Like all other tribes, they express their grief by practising self-inflicted punishment, cutting themselves about the head and body. The Daly tribes also had the peculiar habit of tearing skin off their faces with their nails. Not only would this state of affairs be manifest on losing a beloved member of the tribe, but also on some occasions where white men had treated them kindly for some time (albeit on such occasions, the latter being on their guard for treachery the meanwhile) but at last had to say good-bye.

And now back to the S.S. Happy Family and her people, snugged down for the night in Bynoe Harbour. All hands were stirring at piccaninny daylight the following morning, as it was hoped with a fair run to arrive at Daly River before night fell. Clearing the inlet, the boat was headed a few points off due south and bowled along in great style. The weather was overcast with a few sunny breaks, and there were few rain squalls. The usual wet north-westerly winds sprung up, catching the Happy Family off the aft starboard quarter. The fin was dropped and
up went the canvas, and didn't the boat just clap on speed! The fin was, apparently, one side of a four hundred gallon iron tank, approximately four foot square Joe explained, remarking with pride that he made it himself.

It has been overlooked mentioning that the Lads lost their mal de mer the previous evening, directly on arriving in comparatively smooth water. However, they were doing much better this day, and congratulating themselves they had taken the deep sea sailor's advice and kept on a diet of dried foods etc., and nothing in the fatty line. In spite of a rain squall now and again (the crew taking in sail on such occasions) the Mates found life good: "This was the life!"

It was amusing to watch and listen to George and Joe handle the crew. The orders given in pidgin English were often laughable. The gins and boys yabbered away in their own dialect accompanied with much mirth and yack-si-ing (hurrahing) and, of course, noticing the amused attention of the two young whitefeller strangers, they were showing off. This day Dick wasn't feeling so hot, and one could feel that all hands were waiting expectantly for him to lean over the bulwarks, so they may enjoy a good laugh at the sufferer's expense. Too bad Dick cheated them.

With the exception of a Point Blaze, through clever(?) pieces of navigating on Joe's part, land was seldom seen, and then only dimly through the dull weather. And so Daly River entrance was "fetched up" well before dark. Through the bar channel close to the bank was quiet and deep water alongside a jetty of sorts where Dick and his stores were landed. A gang of niggers who were apparently old acquaintances hopping in and giving a hand, whilst a few Chinese fishermen who were camped nearby stared interestingly at the new arrivals. Incidentally, most of Dick's friends were as naked as Adam, including to a lesser degree some
gins who were squatting on the ground a little way off. Dick shook hands all round and explained he would have no trouble in hiring a boat from the "chows" (Chinese) or a large dugout canoe from the nigs, and the boys would paddle him up river "tomorrow". Dick once again admonished the "young fellers" to be careful of the black velvet down Victoria River way, but "one thing about it, it's safer down there; not like here," nodding his head toward the group of squatting gins. It struck the Lads that Dick was a little nonplussed at their, the Mates', lack of interest. Joe moved the boat along the bank where George reckoned was a good possie to set the lines overnight with a good chance of catching barramundi (a plentiful enough fish up North, similar in appearance and size to the southern jew fish, but darker in colour).

Down came the night black and brooding. The sandflies somewhat let up stinging, but the mosquitos took over, millions of them. Double fires were lit "forrad" and amidships, one for cooking and one for anti-mosquito smoke. George and one of the boys had rowed over to the bank through a break in the mangroves and gathered the necessary anti-mosquito smoke flora, and it proved somewhat effective. Earlier all hands, taking a lead from the crew boys, started smothering themselves with damp and then dry sand and ashes for protection against the sandfly curse, as the stings from the tiny mites and the irresistible scratching caused by the acute irritation of same, brought on horrible weeping sores which led to blood poisoning. The idea also helped against the mosquito attacks which followed. Later Joe remarked to George, "We should have asked the nigs and chows for some buffalo dung. A couple of sticks of twist (cheap inferior tobacco carried about for bartering with the Abos) would have done the trick." (There were then plenty of "buffs" in the Daly River country.) Maggie cooked a good enough barramundi fish tea on the ashes and plenty of it, and it was
good. Incidentally, the fish were procured from the Chinese at the jetty. The Lads, at Joe's suggestion, had pooled their rations (purchased in Darwin) with the boat's tucker supplies, and were quite happy about the arrangement.

For a start, the party was not quite as bright as the previous evening: all hands seemed a bit tired and moody. The nigs in the bow started their queer folk noises (their idea of music and singing), but for some reason on this occasion they got on Joe's nerves and he yelled for them to "Shut yer bloody row up: more quieter or finish corroboree all dead." The tribesmen were silent a few minutes, then started again but kept the tempo down. Now Harry Jones whispered to his Mate, "Get the mouthies out, see if our little show will go over. You can croon a bit too." It was appreciated, went over well. The Lads were agreeably surprised after a few minutes, to realise all hands were in a good mood again, especially the forehands, whom Joe eventually allowed to group well to windward of the whitefellers' fire, and they finished up dancing (or stamping) their queer corroboree steps, the bucks only of course, their women keeping time slapping their thighs or beating time with "kylie" sticks. Both Joe and George played the mouth organ a little, and in spite of the Lads being non-smokers and the former heavy indulgers, the Mates were caught off guard and didn't have the heart to refuse the two old-timers a blow. But when Charlie and Willie put in the same claim by pantomime, that they would also appreciate a blow, they were flatly refused: poor devils were a picture in disappointment, but the Lads hardened their hearts and were adamant. Joe and George for some reason found it a great joke, and laughed uproariously, raucously.

Captain (and owner) "Kimberley Joe" now let it be known that a two man watch was necessary throughout the night, against daring nigger thieves
of course, and not impossibly worse; and although the Lads sensed George didn't think the precaution altogether necessary, it was Joe's responsibility and in his easygoing way he had the knack when necessary of exercising his authority pleasantly without turning a hair. But all hands knew when he meant to be taken in dead earnest. Joe and Harry Jones took one watch, George and Young Bill the other. Joe got his solid old timepiece out, and placed a loaded rifle ready and handy for use, "just in case". A quiet night and nothing happened, but a bit miserable with a heavy enough thunderstorm with some rain (sometimes heavy) for hours, just to remind the company that the wet season wasn't over by any means.

To Young Bill's satisfaction, George talked and talked, very interestingly, a lot about the Victoria River country. Apparently about ninety years back, explained George (to be precise about October 1822)⁵ the windjammer Beagle under Commander Lort Stokes hugged this coastline southward from Palmerston, and was at least the first deep sea vessel to penetrate the river for at least fifty miles, from the entrance at Blunder Bay to Holdfast Reach, the limit navigable for deep sea vessels. The river is navigable for another sixty miles for shallow-draught craft drawing to three feet. There were several large cattle stations along the river: Auvergne, Bradshaw's Run, Victoria River Downs (then the largest cattle run in the world, some "fifteen thousand square miles", but officially some thirteen thousand), and further up the river Wave Hill. George pretty well knew the history of the lot of them, and as usual he had a very interested listener in his watch mate.

Young Bill and George finished their second trick at daylight which

broke cold, overcast and foggy. The "forrard" boys were stirring early, and from them came a cry of dismay on hauling in their barramundi lines, one of which had been robbed by a shark and the other snapped off short. However, a little later a large dugout canoe hove in sight manned by half a dozen of the local blackfellows. They were watched carefully on Joe's reminder, whilst approaching pretty close: "Yes, it's only the Daly, but yer never can tell." The nearest to weapons they carried were several fishing spears, some having from one to four pieces of fencing wire, pointed, on the spearing end of a nine foot shaft. They were mostly fine big fellows, and their colour ranged from dark brown to jet black. One or two were inclined to have straight hair and pleasanter and more aquiline features, inherited from the visiting Malays down through the centuries. They were all stark naked. A desultory conversation was attempted with the crew boys, but apparently they had difficulty in understanding each other's dialect. George explained they just about spoke a different language, being widely separated tribes. However, most of them spoke pidgin English. They wanted to barter some fish for tobacco and tucker, also making it plain they would not turn up their noses at "bee-ra" or "wsk-ee". Joe and George, showing off a little in front of the "newcomers" the latter thought, set up a great haggling in pidgin English and secured a couple of fair sized barramundi in return for three or four sticks of nigger twist and a few pounds of flour.

This day, the third out from Darwin, was pretty well a repetition of the previous day with an actual sunny break or two, but more wind and sea. The weather was just about off the starb'd and the boat rolled a fair bit and shipped enough spray and water at times, but apparently the exceedingly broad beamed boat was riding well. Nevertheless Young Bill and his mate were a bit scared, but the calm demeanour of Joe and George
reassured them. The lads also felt a little seasick. Engine trouble in
the shape of a clogged pump occurred a couple of times, but steady
enough progress was made with the help of a little canvas.

The crew boys and their women seemed in high spirits, especially when
*Happy Family* was making good speed. On Jonsey commenting on same, Joe
explained, "Yes, the b----s, the boat's pointed toward home, they can't
get back quick enough to their own tribal relations, they're looking
after about a dozen piccaninnies for them." During the clearer breaks
with the sun out, the keen eyes of the crew niggers were busy, and they
excitedly pointed with their chins and otherwise (a fairly universal
Abo. custom is that they point with a jerk of their chins in the
necessary direction) toward blackfeller signal smokes along the coast.
News of the *Family*'s progress was being sent on ahead from tribe to
tribe, apparently a general custom observable when off nigger country.
The mates were invited to observe same through George's powerful
glasses, and found same fascinating pastime. Joe and George just took
this smoke nigger talk for granted, casually remarking, "We'll have to
watch out for these b----s tonight, they'll get no chance at all."

Nightfall found the *Family* anchored off and just inside the western
headland of Port Keats: not too far in, too much of a temptation for the
niggers, and this time the lads noticed George thoroughly agreed with
Joe, the place was "proper bad nigger country", had a bloody enough
record, "but they'll get no chance at us". Coming on dusk when it
appeared the night might settle down to calmer weather, Joe ordered the
four whites to buckle on their loaded revolvers and have their several
rifles ready for instant use, just inside the cabin door. Needless to
say the two young adventurers got a great thrill out of this necessary
precaution, secretly hoping the necessity would arise for use of the
firearms. Joe also ordered no lights or smoking except in the cabin,
the portholes of which were well darkened.
From what the lads had heard of these myalls of Port Keats, the Jilngali tribe (locally always referred to as the Ginaleie), the precautions taken were quite necessary, the Ginaleie being likely enough (an old habit of theirs) to swim out with the necessary weapons to any unwatchful lugger, and kill all hands.

Yes, George and Joe knew all about Port Keats, and were only too willing to pass the story on to the mates. Some few years back (approximately 1904-05) a well known pioneer grazier of the North (brother of Captain Joe Bradshaw, founder and owner of Bradshaw's Run on the Victoria River) was on his way to Darwin per launch accompanied by three other whites including a Russian "engineer" (long an employee of Captain J. Bradshaw's and infamous for his harshness and cruelty to the blacks) and two white stockmen: one from Bradshaw, and one from Auvergne station who was carrying a badly enough broken arm in a sling (thrown from a buck-jumper) and on his way to medical aid and a doctor (the nearest) at Darwin. There was also a "crew" of several Victoria River boys from Bradshaw's. Fred Bradshaw was to be in Darwin in plenty of time for Christmas, and was expecting to meet his brother Cap'n Joe, just about to return from overseas. The launch party put in to Port Keats, where a group of government white men were drilling for coal (it was there, but subsequently ascertained not nearly in sufficient quantity to be of any commercial use). During the night, the Victoria River crew boys cleared out (a usual enough habit when reaching the limits of their tribal lands) and five of the local Ginaleie tribe boys were "persuaded" (probably forced at the point of a gun, or several guns, and securely "ironed") to take the absconders' place. The Russian "Ivan the Terrible" would know how to handle this part of the business.

6The criptic note "(e.b.i.d. f.n. pge.)" appears here in the original text.
The government drilling party were apparently not very experienced at handling myall blacks, and treated them over kindly etc., with the result that they had become cheeky and threatening, and this was the state of affairs the experienced Bradshaw and party found on landing and contacting the white men's camp. The myalls' women had even disappeared some days previously, all of them: a very bad sign indeed. However, Bradshaw warned these whites of their imminent danger of treacherous attack, and same was well heeded, every man being well armed all the time, and the myalls given absolutely to understand they must keep well away from the camp under pain of being shot at; and a sentry guard, or two, were now continually on watch. The myalls gave no further trouble, but unknown to the whites they were busy stalking Bradshaw's launch, for several reasons apparently: their tribesmen were being held aboard against their will, they were anxious to get square with the tyrant Russian Ivan, and of course there would be the pleasure of killing and acquiring the white men's loot. It seemed quite likely that had Bradshaw and his companions not arrived at the coal drilling camp, there may have been a somewhat similar massacre of whites as the tragedy of the Daly River copper mine, which occurred a few years earlier.

However, in due course Bradshaw was off with the tide before dawn, proceeding up the coast toward Darwin, little knowing they were being shadowed by the myalls hidden in the jungle along the shoreline. The first night out from the Keats they were anchored in the vicinity of a Point Scott, about forty miles from the Port, and it appears for some reason lights were left burning. The captive nigger crew were still in leg-irons, and all the whites were at least off guard and probably asleep. Captain "Kimberley" Joe and his mate George of the Happy Family could just not understand how these white men so experienced in the wiles of the myalls, could be caught off guard in this manner. The
irony of it, just after warning the drilling party of the selfsame danger. However, during the night the niggers swam out the necessary weapons, probably only nulla-nullas and stone tomahawks, butchered all four white men in quick time, eventually "throwing the bodies to the crocodiles". They then released their tribesmen from their irons, and an orgy of looting was enjoyed. It was even eventually ascertained that the lights (lamps) were taken ashore still burning, a phenomenon these Stone Age men just didn't understand.

Incidentally, a couple of years previous to this massacre, the Russian had experienced a very narrow escape whilst cruising with another white in a launch up the Daly River. The blacks attacked and Ivan's mate was killed, the Russian being struck and knocked overboard. He was quick enough to haul himself into the dinghy, cut the painter and escape: a narrow shave.

Meanwhile, subsequent to the massacre at Point Scott, Captain Joe Bradshaw awaited his brother in Darwin, and it was some time before definite news came through of the death of his brother Fred and his party. A strong posse of police were speedily organised under an Inspector Waters, and journeyed by water to Port Keats. Before long eight strapping savages were rounded up from the jungle, and some of them were known to be the guilty slayers. Compelled by the threatening firearms at their bodies, these blacks, all "fine big powerful fellows", were brought into the drilling camp. But when it came to shackling them, they spontaneously and apparently unexpectedly "broke" for the bush. The police must have been caught off guard, as only two of their "catch" were retained. Two were shot dead whilst running, and four got clean away.

The two remaining prisoners refused to "talk", so the Northern
Territory police put them through the local third degree, the usual custom at the time under such circs out in those uncivilised regions. Chained to a tree in such a position that they could not sleep, and nothing to drink whatever (and no doubt worse, such as a mouthful of salt forced down their throats). It is known at least unofficially, that sometimes the victims would stick it to the death without talking, but this didn't happen in this case, and the whole story was painstakingly extracted from them. The launch, on the blacks' information, was found scuttled among the mangroves, and eventually the remains of the four bodies were washed ashore by the spring tides. Captain Joe Bradshaw had the crude coffins carried by the semi-civilised naked blacks to the top of a rugged range at the back of the homestead, and there no doubt they rest to this day, on a rugged near mountain which became known as Bradshaw's Tomb.

Eventually members of several salt-water tribes between Point Scott and Bradshaw's Run were arrayed for trial at Port Darwin. Amongst the prisoners were the original Victoria River boys who deserted Fred Bradshaw's launch at Port Keats, and it was established at the unique trial that it was actually they who led the salt-water killers. They were out for long delayed revenge against Ivan the Terrible, and the remaining salt water tribesmen "climbed on the band wagon". Their spokesman at the trial was an intelligent old man of the Alura tribe (Alleylooyer in the vernacular) whose country was around the mouth of the Victoria River, and of course he was well schooled by clever white councl. Their plea was [that] the prolonged harsh cruelty (and no doubt worse) of the Russian toward their people, had compelled them through tribal law of an eye for an eye etc., to seek out and kill their tormentor. This line of defence saved the worst of them from the death penalty: everyone knew of Ivan's persistent cruelty to the blacks.
Several of the accused, including boys from Bradshaw's Run who originally crewed the ill-fated launch and played a leading part with the other myalls in the killing, were sentenced to imprisonment for life. In effect this meant settling down to a few easy years in Fanny Bay Gaol, with plenty of tucker with light work for a few years, then release and loafing around the outskirts of the town, some of them becoming clever police trackers, and others good stockmen on close in stations, where the white men's law protected them from the "civilised" tribes. Very few myalls (the further out wild ones) who did any length of time at Fanny Bay "home" ever rejoined their tribe. They had found out life was too hard back amongst their people, and civilisation as they had learnt to live it was much more preferable.7

But to get back to the Happy Family and its heroic(?) occupants. This night, the third out from Darwin, was hell. The Family may have been safe from myall nigger attack, but she was not so safe from the sea. The boat pitched and rolled at the end of the straining anchor chain, and when it was realised during the pitch-black night that the anchor was dragging, the second one was got ready and heaved over. It rained, including a couple of storms, and blew like hell all night. Young Bill was seasick, cold and miserable, and his mate Jonsey was not much better: the mates had broken their dry tucker fast and had indulged freely of fish, some of it actually fried. Joe and George were quiet and grim, and confessed later they had not been feeling too hot themselves. The Abos had a miserably cold time: no fires at all this night, considered inadvisable, too likely as a beacon for the watching myalls ashore, and later in the night the weather was too rough for

7Lavender has used Hill's The Territory pp.250-53, in reference to this incident.
fires. And so the crew Abos squatted crouched up under their skimpy shelter with their heads down between their knees, sometimes for hours at a time without moving, gripping with one hand any old sacking etc. around their shoulders, and hanging on to a temporarily rigged safety line with the other. Joe and George tried rousting them out now and again, but this later proved so arduous a task to get them up and about, that they were left to squat in their misery.

The tiny cabin was available to the whites off shift, plus Joe and George's Maggie; and there was this to be said of the latter, about once an hour she visited her people up forward and spent some time with them. The stench in the cabin can be imagined, especially when Bill and his mate on alternative shifts made use of a little canvas bag Maggie dug up for their convenience. The highlight of the night was George coming to light with some good strong rum, which was weighed out very sparingly nevertheless. Young Bill had difficulty in keeping his nip down, but as daylight approached the weather quietened down somewhat, and feeling better he was able to keep one down with the rest and felt much better.

Shortly after daylight Joe reckoned the weather was steadying, and all hands including the boys and their gins were feeling better after some sea biscuit and a final nip of rum. Whilst this "breakfast" was going on, the boys indicated where a group of myalls were observing the boat from the top of a low red cliff where the sea was breaking on the beach below. Joe passed the glasses round, and George drew the lads' attention to the appearance of these blacks, different to what had been observed back at the Daly and up Darwin way. Most of them were big full-chested fellows, their hair was longer and straighter and their features were more comely. They certainly appeared serious enough looking, no smiles. George declared they were different to most tribes in that they were not as light-hearted and jocular as the general run of
Abos, hadn't their usual sense of humour, and that some of them had Jewish noses, and that these traits came about by the infusion of the visiting Malays, who used to visit this coast centuries ago. Joe, who perhaps was more used to taking a peep through the powerful glasses, declared he actually discerned disappointment in their countenances, and this would be natural enough. Apparently they had had little or no contact with whites since the coal drillers had departed some few years earlier, and here now was a chance missed to trade (or a killing and looting orgy) on account of the inclemency of the weather, to put it mildly. None of them appeared to be carrying any weapons, but as George made the point, "they wouldn't be". Their idea of course would be to outwardly manifest friendliness and endeavour to lure at least small parties ashore. George reckoned there would be all the weapons in the world hidden in the low scrub a few yards behind them. However, checking up through later months on all this information in reference to these particular salt water myalls, the lads learnt George had them pretty well summed up.

Making out of the port and setting a southerly course, the weather was fresh enough but quietened off considerably as the day wore on, and there was very little rain and more sunshine. Some sail was set and the boat fairly bounded along with the monsoon off the starboard stern quarter. Spirits rose again, and the boys and whites soon became happy as sandboys. Comparative hardship was over for the time being and the Happy Family lived up to its name. The hellish night was over and tomorrow was another day, and at least for Young Bill and Harry Jones that was the spirit of those free and easy days. The pace was a cracker all day, and when Joe anchored at the mouth of the river in Blunder Bay, Kimberley Joe declared they had travelled well over a hundred miles. The lads were reminded they were a couple of hundred miles south of
Darwin, and the wet would be well on the take up, and should now improve rapidly as they moved further south up the river. The rainfall over the wet was about half that of Darwin, some thirty inches annually as against sixty.

Shortly after rounding Point Pearce that day with the sun out and warming nature up, the boat cruised within about fifty yards of several crocodiles dozing and riding on top of the swell, warming themselves up. As usual the boys saw them first through the glasses. Two or three big ones stood out from the rest and all hands scrambled for their rifles, but what with the swell and roll of the boat the 'gators were not exactly a sitting shot. Just as they were coming into good range, their lookout 'gator apparently spotted the strangers and they all quickly sank out of sight amidst the splashes of a futile volley or two from the disappointed marksmen. Treachery Bay was just round east of Point Pearce, and it was here that Lieut. Lort Stokes (as previously mentioned), commander of the windjammer Beagle back in 1839, was speared through the shoulder whilst ashore, when cut off from his party and running to rejoin them and the ship's boat. It was a bad wound, but he eventually recovered under the care of Surgeon Bynoe (whom our before mentioned Bynoe Harbour was named for).
Clumps of tall and invitingly shady trees seemed to be grouped about some of the flats and creeks observed at Port Keats and after coming round Point Pearce and turning just about south for the Victoria River mouth: Tamarind trees, and another reminder of the Malays who originally brought them from their homeland. The voyagers were now in a mighty inlet which gradually closed into the "Big River" and was named Queen's Channel (for Queen Victoria of course).

From Blunder Bay where the river really seemed to begin, the land- and sea-scape seemed, well, a little weird and lonely, Young Bill and his mate thought; and in any direction almost were low, rocky, sparsely timbered ridges, and on the horizon erratically contoured red hills, most of them bald and barren. The prevailing timber other than mangrove was predominantly boabs, many of them a great size. Deciduous trees, they were now heavily foliaged and more or less decorated with large red flowers, making an attractive picture. Ant hills were numerous enough in places, some of them huge, and they added somewhat to the unique appearance of the countryside.

The salt-water Abo. smoke signals had already informed the camp at Blunder Bay (the unloading depot for the coastal shipping) that the Happy Family would be arriving, and a motley enough crowd of Abos were gathered to welcome the newcomers. The lads learnt later, these people
even knew there were a couple of young fellows amongst the company who
were new chums to the North. "Yorge" (George) had quite a few cobbers
amongst them who hailed him vociferously, and Joe seemed familiar with
an odd one or two. The crew boys and their women seemed scared of them
and kept quiet and well in the background. Most of the welcoming blacks
were the Blunder Bay "wharf lumpers" who did all the manual work in
unloading the coastal steamers that arrived between the wets. On the
outskirts of the more "civilised" mob were a few (as there generally was
in such gatherings) really shy and even frightened myalls, actually too
nervous to approach any closer to the white men. These Abos were armed
to the teeth but of course made no display of same.

Also in the background were a couple of groups of Abo. gins, the
semi-civilised ones not so far away, and the semi-wild myalls' women the
furthest away of all. And there, over alongside the bank, were a couple
of roomy barges and the launch used for towing them up the river to the
Victoria River Depot. The imported Arab barge and the launch crew were
away putting in time over the wet season, leaving a couple of reliable
civilised boys in charge, and to the latters' credit let it be known,
they were the only ones amongst the mixed horde who were decently
clothed, the vast majority of the others being stark naked. These
niggers were a mixed lot of river and salt-water Abos, and their
"physogs" varied from repulsive to pleasant enough. Their colour also
varied in shades, and some had fairly straight hair and more aquiline
features. Most here of fine physique, and heavy enough legged, the
latter attribute more evidence of Malay infusion. Incidentally, just by
way of course of advertising the fact that the Happy Family was well
armed, should any of the myalls (and semi-civilised boys) get any
notions, the lads noticed Joe and George had "carelessly" left a couple
of loaded rifles in full view on the cabin roof. A lot of them seemed
over cheeky and too forward; over sophisticated as it were.
The two boys left in charge (they with the clothes, and no doubt they clung to them as a badge of authority) were intelligent enough, and intimated to Joe and George that the wet had pretty well lifted, and the river was practically negotiable provided one knew it well enough (as Joe certainly did), moving up with the tide, and sheltering in suitable places during the ebb. There was still a lot of drainage water coming down. On the other hand, the wharfies wanted the boat unloaded: they and their guests the myalls had apparently worked themselves up into a pitch of excitement at the prospect of a couple of days of white man's tucker and other handouts. They were loud in their acclamations, the river was too dangerous to tackle. However, George and Joe were wise to their ruse, but cushioned their disappointment with a liberal handout of flour, jam, tea and sugar etc., and of course plenty of nigger twist. It was apparent that at least George was anxious to keep in good with these people, for future occasions.

Incidentally, it has been overlooked mentioning the current and rip experienced whilst coming in from Point Pearce was a bit frightening at times. The mates wondered how Joe would have managed without George's knowledge of these waters. As the keel and hence the sails were worse than useless in these circumstances and had been stowed, one wondered what would happen if the engine petered out. But Joe and George, although alert and watchful, did not seem worried, and their attitude reassured the lads somewhat. The two "clothed" boys had also explained a steamer could be due in from Wyndham in "not too long", and of course they only unloaded for the river in between wets.

However, after the courtesy of lying close enough in and exchanging gossip and badinage with the shore boys, and stalling (not wishing to offend their finer feelings) the offer of delivering black velvet aboard, Joe considered it prudent to anchor for the night well clear of
the shore, and George piloted the boat to deep enough water (the tide
was "down" but there was apparently anything up to a fifteen foot rise
to high of same) and clear of any rip. Joe, and in no uncertain manner,
had already given the welcoming company to understand there would be no
coming aboard, and all craft must keep their distance: and the boys
understood, very well.

But the welcoming hosts were not finished with the new arrivals yet,
for now a well-manned couple of canoes approached to within conversing
distance and invited the company (in pidgin English of course) to attend
their corroboree after "sun he sit down". Joe remarked, addressing the
lads, "That's meant for you two blokes, they know we (Joe and George)
wouldn't go a hundred yards to watch their silly black-feller business,
seen hundreds of 'em. Anyhow, you two blokes better stay aboard, don't
want any trouble, you'll see all yer want later on. They're only after
booze anyway." But again sparing the hosts' finer feelings, Joe
intimated that the new arrivals to the North would appreciate a display
of boomerang throwing right now, before sunset. But the answer was on
account of the tide covering the hard belt of sand along the shoreline:
the display was not practicable. But the following day whilst the tide
was out, they would be able to put on a good show, including sham
fighting. The shore boys were of course still trying to entice the
visitors to prolong their stay. Incidentally, the returning or comeback
boomerang is unknown throughout the North, but the huge hunting and
fighting one had been highly developed. The Abos often practised their
throwing, also sham fighting, with blunted spears etc. and shields, on
the long straight lengths of hard beach sand. The big boomerangs were
flung vertically and at an angle of some forty-five degrees into the
air, and after striking the hard sand (but not hard enough to damage the
weapon) with tremendous force after a flight of a hundred yards or so,
would bounce into the air for another fifty yards, followed by more bouncings within diminishing lengths. It was not hard for an observer to imagine how extremely damaging a hit could be from one of these weapons. However, Young Bill and Harry Jones were to see all this in due course, as Kimberley Joe predicted. When Joe later remarked on how lucky he felt, that the wet had lifted early "down this way", and even the tide was with them ("catch it first thing in the morning"), the lads were not altogether in agreement. They would have liked to have seen more of this somehow fascinating place.

It was one of those thrilling mornings with the sun full out and prospects of a fine day. The mates were off up the almost legendary (to Southerners) Victoria River and would soon be amongst the big and famous cattle stations: the ultimate desire of many venturesome "knockabout" young fellows out Queensland way those days; but few had the determination to persevere and go there. The lads felt they would be able to talk now, and other fellows would look up to them and listen.

Shortly after starting and rounding a bend, a huge stretch of water opened up called Holdfast Reach. It was anything [up] to one and a half miles wide and proved some twenty-five miles long. As usual George gave a running account of everything, to the gratification of the mates. This part of the river had been named on account of the windjammer Beagle (which was manhandled some fifty miles up stream back in 1839)\(^1\) losing two anchors in the quicksands; just swallowed up and couldn't be hauled out, and they are still there. The river traversed this day reminded Young Bill of parts of the shoreline of Sydney Harbour and the Hawkesbury River, especially on entering a narrow stretch further up,

\(^1\)The words "on account of her" here deleted.
Whirlpool Reach: tall bluffs and cliffs, very rugged. Tide rips, currents and whirlpools abounded, the latter (and George couldn't dodge them all) at times seemed actually sucking the boat down a few inches. However, Joe and George (the latter at the wheel of course), though alert at all times, were otherwise normal and so once again the lads endeavoured to appear the same. This narrowed and walled in portion of the river lent itself very much to many times repeated echoing, as sound was flung off one cliff face only to contact and rebound off another, and same repeated many times over. The lads got firing their rifles and the resulting echoes paid off handsomely. It was altogether most fascinating. At Gallipoli some eighteen months or so later, the sound of echoing broadsides of the British Battle Fleet bombarding the Dardanelles Narrows (straits) reacted in just such a similar manner, but the echoes were of course much more intensely thunderous and prolonged. Nevertheless, these occurrences at the time always reminded Young Bill of his trip up the Victoria River (same bringing a pang of homesickness, and his war only started, with three and a half years to go).

About this time two rather remarkable features in the landscape came into view: Curiosity Peak just in from the southern bank, and a little further on the Dome, in from the north bank. These two outstanding "mountains", alternately or together, were observed ahead, astern, or off either beam or quarters for many miles, according to how the river twisted and turned, and added much to the fascination of the trip.

Sure enough the Abos' talk smokes preceded them, the Happy Family, from one side of the river to the other and many miles on ahead, although no blacks were observed until reaching camp that afternoon. Joe remarked, "Well! at least we won't arrive unexpected, the folk up river'll 'ave the billy boilin'." The crew boys were as usual quick to spot an odd 'gator cruising in the calm water well away from the boat,
generally with only tip of nose and eyes clear of the water. Same were fired on when opportunity offered and there may have been a hit or two, but in most cases they, the 'gators, submerged before being seen by the less keen eyes of the whites. However, came one gift on a silver platter, observed by the boys some hundreds of yards ahead was an enormous croc. asleep on a rock, with its tail dangling in the water; a perfect picture through Joe's glasses. It was agreed that all hands hold their fire until Joe gave the signal at about one hundred yards range. Three rifles barked and the croc., also the rock, were certainly hit, but of course as usual apparently, the monster gave a convulsive heave and disappeared into the river, but it was good sport.

It appears the last twenty miles or so of the Happy Family's voyage this day was along part of Auvergne station's northern boundary, that was along the travellers' right-hand bank of the river which hereabouts ran approximately east and west. And the wild country off the opposite bank to the north was just a vast mostly unexplored no-man's-land where the myall blacks still reigned supreme as in the previous thousands of years. However, the country on ahead south side of the river was Auvergne station right up to the Depot.

And so in the late afternoon hereabouts and in the vicinity of the Peak, as the outgoing tide was beginning to hamper progress and the worst of the dreaded mosquito flats were just ahead of them, George now piloted the boat into a narrow mudbanked and mangroved backwater or creek, to be snugged down for the night.

Auvergne station, a big run by any comparison (and still is), was formed in 1886 by Macartney and Mayne after being literally hunted by the blacks from their Arnhem Land property Florida on the Goyder River, when the remnants of the herd were droved about a thousand miles west to
the new holding, by Tom Hardy and others, the greater part of the cattle having been speared at Florida. The blacks were a little quieter on the Baines River, but not much. How the holding came to acquire a French name has remained a mystery to all experienced researchers. Auvergne had a tragic history during the first few decades of its history, more so than most stations. The first manager, Tom Hardy, he who helped bring the cattle over from north-east Arnhem Land, was speared to death. The homestead was about forty-five miles from the Victoria River up the Baines River. As usual the myalls had been watching the new camp of the three white men, and probably knew of the temporary absence of two of them; probably had also observed that one or other of them went down to the river first thing in the morning to dip the bucket. This particular morning at piccaninny daylight the lone white man carried his rifle with him, and put it down whilst dipping for the water. From a hidden ambush he was speared in the throat, staggered and crawled back to the hut doorway and died; and that's where the two stockmen found their late boss on their return.

Three years later diners at tea on the homestead verandah were suddenly the target for many spears, presumably thrown from ambush at long range, as the whites suffered no casualties. The homestead was adjacent to the Pinkerton Ranges, and it lent itself to stealthy approach. It is on record that a vengeance party "rode the ranges" (where the myalls always skulked after a near or actual killing) and the would-be murderers(?) paid a heavy price for the audacious attack and no doubt other incidents were taken into account also, including poor Hardy's tragic death.

Next victim to the hoodoo was "Greenhide" Sam Croker, a previous early manager (if not the first) of Wave Hill station, who was shot dead by a sensitively brooding half-caste named Charlie Flanagan who became
incensed one wet season night over a game of cards, at Sam's persistent and cruelly caustic remarks in reference to the coloured man's misfortune of being a, well, a half-caste. It appears Flanagan was a fine stockman and horseman and all-round good sport, but over-sensitive of his mixed blood, always desperately trying to live "white man" fashion. He was eventually arrested after being decoyed to Wyndham, condemned to death in Darwin, and was the first person hung at Fanny Bay Gaol. It is on record he died game enough, literally laughed at the prospect of death right to the end. Incidentally, the impression Young Bill formed of the opinion of the old hand Northerners ref. the shooting was that Greenhide Sam, a game and reckless fellow, was to say the least very unwise taunting the would-be "all white" half-caste, he should have known better, and actually "copped" what he was looking for. The next tragedy was the death of head stockman Jerry Skeehan (the then manager's brother), killed by the myalls along with several others as already related, aboard Bradshaw's launch off Point Scott when on their way to Darwin near the end of 1905. Then the "Fizzer" (of Mrs Aeneas Gunn's We of The Never-Never fame) managed for a while, peacefully apparently, but was later drowned further up the Big River, under heroic circumstances (as related [below]).

Archie Skuthorpe was next manager, victim to the Auvergne curse (as it were). He was speared in the shoulder whilst hunting down cattle spearing myalls: rode off some two hundred mile to Wyndham for medical attention, with part of the spearhead still in the wound. However, he returned home with the part spearhead still in his shoulder, in preference to the operation of having same extracted (foolish as it may seem!?). Some short time later he was thrown from the saddle and killed.

Then one of the famous Duracks of the Kimberleys, Neil, took over the
management, and his wife accompanied him. Mrs Neil in due course had occasion to catch the steamer south from Wyndham. During her absence Neil visited the Victoria Depot races and cleaned up the best part of a thousand pounds. Then he started for home via Wyndham and the telegraph, some two hundred miles (the nearest), to pass the good news to his wife, and no doubt to acquire other news very important to himself in particular. But alas, in swimming the flooded Ord River he was drowned. As usual in such cases, the blacks found the body and his roll, including of course some cheques was in his pocket [sic]. It is an undoubted fact that every cheque was rewritten anew for his widow.

Just after the First World War, a returned soldier from years of service overseas, was mortally speared whilst running for his rifle at his camp. He had just completed a job of work for Auvergne, and had sent his boy out after the horses preparatory to breaking camp, and on the boy's return he found his boss speared to death and the camp ransacked. A pathetic touch: amongst his belongings were found letters from a mademoiselle in France. Then later Harry Shadforth, a noted cattleman and pioneer of the North, was manager for some years. But the tragic taboo still held good, and he was eventually charged in the stockyard by a wild and determined cow, and the result was fatal.2

Whilst all these fatalities, accidental and otherwise, were accruing (and those causing actual death only have been mentioned), goodness only knows how many Aboriginals were obliterated and maimed by the all conquering whites whilst forcibly occupying their - the Aborigines' - country: a sad story, a phase of the pioneering days that the whites the world over (as has already been remarked on) can hardly be proud of.

2The preceding four paragraphs concerning Auvergne are based very closely on Hill's The Territory, pp.241-44.
Included in the "get-atable" records of the Auvergne hoodoo are a very heavy proportion of managers as victims. It would be most extraordinary if the heavy proportion were fact! More likely the fatality records of the mere stockmen station hands are not available on account of the necessary records having been lost, and being for the most part just swagmen wanderers (albeit most of them had a string of fine horses) without family connections, and so the story of the demise or injury has not been passed on in local "folk" tales.

A latter day manager, accompanied by his wife and family, was a Mr Reg Durack, a descendant of the famous pioneering and overlanding family, [who journeyed from] Goulburn, New South Wales, to the Kimberleys via south-west Queensland, where for some years they pioneered hugh cattle runs (the area being referred to in Queensland as "down in the corner"). It is interesting to note at the termination of this description of the old hoodoo that marched with Auvergne, that Mr R. Durack's two talented authoress sisters spent some considerable time on the famous (and we almost said infamous) station, and no doubt used the local atmosphere as inspiration for some of their fine books on the Aboriginals and their environment.

However, the old hoodoo was apparently lifted some decades back and existence is quite normal today. A most out-of-the-way and lonely spot in the old days, the original bush track connecting Wyndham and Darwin and passing adjacent to the homestead has become a busy main road today, with all that means in passing motor traffic and callers, to say nothing of the pedal wireless for the Flying Doctor, telephone of course, and such amenities as fly-gauzing, refrigeration, electric lighting, etc., etc..

And now back to the Happy Family and her company. George nursed the
boat some hundreds of yards up the backwater, in from the boats starboard side that was the southern bank of the river hereabouts. The "hooks" were dropped in a position where the waterway opened out temporarily to about a hundred yards. George of course had used this haven before in similar circumstances, and explained that when the tide became lower the boat would rest on the mud. Several 'gators slithered down the mud banks to the water, and there was more practice shooting, but they proved that shy that Joe and George reckoned they must have been hunted some, probably by the niggers (which proved true).

As the boat approached the anchorage, an almighty hullabaloo came from the up stream direction: flying foxes, and by the row a mighty big school. Then the crew boys reckoned they could smell fire, although they hadn't seen any smoke. "Myall," they declared, pointing their chins and gesticulating toward the brooding mangroves and scrub. The old firm Joe and George were sure now there were niggers about and ordered the whites to buckle on their revolver belts and keep them there. The rifles were already on show on the cabin roof. "They've (the niggers) been watching us of course, the station boys'll show up when they've decided we mean them no harm." Joe thereupon conspicuously had the boys hang up a couple of branches (from the anti—mosquito smoke reserve), a sure peace sign, and the same was given by hand extended in the Abo. manner. Sure enough, here they emerged from the scrub, a round dozen of them. They looked a motley lot, smothered in rubbed-in ashes over goanna and 'gator oil: mosquito attack protection of course. The "old firm" reckoned they would stink to high heaven: "Been living on flying foxes and 'gator meat, that's a cert." A pidgin yabber was attempted at about fifty yards range, and it appeared they were Auvergne station boys on walkabout with a few near myalls, and yes, they were working and nursing the flying fox tucker, and trapping and spearing an odd 'gator.
Now a canoe hove into sight and was allowed to approach the Happy Family, but on the lee side (there was a little wind in this locked in area), the old firm hoping to acquire some barramundi. Even with the precaution ref. the breeze the niggers smelt horribly, and anybody having experienced close proximity to crocs and 'foxes will appreciate the remarks. The myalls hoped to trade some of their "fresh meat" (?) with the crew boys. However, there was no fish offered, but heavens above guess what: they had a large enough 'gator alive and trussed to a sapling. The best half of its tail had been cut off and of course eaten, and whilst the Happy Family company watched, the visitors hacked off a large chunk with a tomahawk and offered it fairly quivering to the crew boys, along with several foxes. It was easy to discern the crew boys would have delightedly accepted the barter, drawing on their nigger twist rations for payment. But George thought matters had gone far enough, wouldn't allow the stinkin' stuff aboard. And no, the offer of their "stinkin'" women was not wanted either, and flinging the visitors several plugs of the usual just to show there was no ill feeling, hunted them to hell in no uncertain manner, giving them to understand they could come back with fish only, but if they came within half a mile of the boat after dark they would certainly be fired on. Incidentally, the poor croc. had the temerity to resent being butchered alive, and just about bent the sapling in its writhings, hissing viciously the meanwhile and causing the canoe occupants concern lest they be capsized.

A thunderstorm had been brewing, and now amidst deafening thunder and lightning the rain came down in sheets; one of the last storms of the breaking up of the wet season. However, in the late afternoon the

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3 In the original document this sentence appears as a note added to the foot of the page after the initial typing.
tropical downpour was over, the evening was hot and clammy, the boat rested on the mud with a slight list, and the mosquitos closed in in millions. And, the lads were being entertained in witnessing for the first time a near phenomena almost of nature: hundreds of thousands of flying foxes amidst tremendous noise, leaving their daytime camp and flying in dense clouds overhead to some feeding grounds away over the river somewhere to the northward.

It was a beautiful starry night with just enough moon for the first watches to get a clear view all round the lagoon. Two whites and two crew boys and women, a watch of four, on shift about. Young Bill was on with George again, and learnt all about 'gators and flying foxes. The former could be heard occasionally, a low pitched sound, between a grunting and a bull bellowing in the distance, and later when the moon disappeared and the boat's lanterns were lighted to afford the watchers a better view, their wicked eyes could be picked out at some distance. Joe declared that like most animals, the croc. (or 'gator) is very curious. A great coward on land except when they catch their victim asleep, they are terribly dangerous in the water, and once they take hold on anything they hang on like grim death; and that is what it generally amounts to at this stage: a horrible death for the victim.

George advised great caution whilst dipping a billy or drinking at the edge of a waterhole, many a man, black and white, had been seized by their powerful jaws alongside deep water, or swept by their tails into deep or shallow water. Very many animals fall to these dangers, the larger ones including even bull buffalos being seized by the snout and gradually tugged into deep water.

George told of a very distressing case he had witnessed of a fine spirited horse taken in this manner, higher up the river toward the Depot, where he and a couple of other fellows on the Bradshaw's Run side
observed a small mob of horses on the Auvergne side of the river, approaching the water in such a manner that his friends, who were stockmen long experienced to this country, remarked that the horses were apparently strange to the river, or they would not walk straight into the water with such unhesitating confidence. Stock reared or at least grazed some time in this country become 'gator shy at the drinking places and approach same with much hesitancy and caution; and at that, they are sometimes taken or badly mauled. And so, whilst George and his friends watched, the fine looking horse was seized in the terrible jaws of a croc., or 'gator, and there followed a terrible struggle. The victim's mates of course stampeded off at once in great alarm, but the 'gator's victim put up a great fight for life. Whinnying and screaming, the gelding fairly sat back on his haunches and a tug of war ensued, the beautiful animal actually winning for a while. But now the 'gator (and it was not a large one, otherwise its victim would have had no chance at all), writhed violently threshing its tail and body about most ferociously. These savage tactics were too much for the poor victim which now fell over sideways, and amidst tremendous splashing was dragged from sight. The 'gator prefers his food "high", and would almost certainly jam its catch in an underwater cave or some waterlogged tree fallen into the river, etc..

"Yes," said George, "and that's why I (and he could have included everyone else up North) love all 'gators; like hell!! It didn't upset me in the least watching those niggers hacking into that live 'gator, and it'll be carved up fresh a lot more during the next few days before the nigs are on a stale 'gator meat diet." George said later news from Auvergne confirmed the surmise that the horses observed approaching the drinking water with such careless confidence came from the Finke River country south of Wave Hill, well clear of the croc. country. The
horses were running near the river by an oversight (probably making their way south and home), similar arrivals generally being turned out on country well away from the 'gator danger, and shepherded until educated by stock well wise to the lurking monsters.

Flying foxes were then discussed. Young Bill's trick mate knew a lot about them too. "Anybody who's knocked about a bit in this coast jungle country up here comes up against tens of thousands of them sooner or later": a pity Young Bill and his mate couldn't get a look at this particular flight, hanging to the trees upside down, "like bunches of grapes, several hanging onto one another, and fighting and squarking all day long." The mates did eventually catch up with George's prediction, but they had a lot of travelling in front of them before doing so.

Kimberley Joe and Harry Jones were on watch after midnight, also one of the crew boys and his woman (the latter two as usual nervous and suspicious of the strange myalls). The boat was floating again in plenty of water. Suddenly out of the blue came a whirring sound, and a big fighting boomerang struck the deck under the opposite bulwark with tremendous force, the latter apparently preventing the weapon from rising into the air, and after ricocheting and sliding between the bulwarks and other solid obstacles, miraculously missing the watch members without doing any damage of consequence, came to rest against the keel casing. The watch were mesmerised during the seconds all this was taking place, but on realising what had happened they speedily opened up with the rifles toward where the whirring sound started. Those off watch startled by the sudden whack of the contacting boomerang and rifle fire, scrambled up with their firearms and in seconds the bewildered and excited crew members were putting up a tremendous fusillade into the scrub all round the boat. This continued for a few rounds, when Young Bill realised Joe was yelling and gesticulating for
the company to stop firing. "What the hell's up with everyone, what yez shooting at??" The firing suddenly stopped and Joe gave a high pitched nervous laugh and asked, "Is anybody hurt?" and on the company realising nobody was hurt, and on George remarking, "But we're all scared," Joe started to laugh heartedly [sic]. Then everybody was laughing and accusing everyone else of panicking over nothing at all. "Don't know so much about that," said Joe, picking up the big hunting boomerang. "If this had hit anybody it would have just about cut 'em in half. Probably only some silly b----- of a number one larrikin of a station boy having a bit of a lark" (and how true Joe's guess proved to be!). "All the same, keep a sharp look out for a while, there may be more to come." But nothing at all happened.

At sparrow chirp that morning when the last of the flying foxes were passing over making for the day's camp, a canoe load of Abos gingerly approached displaying fish, and very closely watched by the suspicious "all ready" whites. Ensued a long yabber ref. the boomerang incident. The weapon was instantly recognised, belonged to a myall back at the camp. It appeared one "py-thon" (python: large variety of snake), a number one larrikin Auvergne station boy who had been quarrelling and making mischief in the camp, had cleared out the night before after stealing spears and a boomerang etc. from the myalls. It was surmised he was on his way back to the station and the protection of the white bosses, and a tracking party were already on his scent. Being a "civilised" station boy, he would travel by night, sufficiently unafraid of the evil spirits. They, the Abos, amidst much tongue clicking and head nodding were all agreed that py-thon was one much big b-----, and they would catch up with him some day.

They were childishly delighted to have the boomerang back, and when it was agreed by the whites that it was a wonder it wasn't rendered useless
by its violent contact with the Happy Family, a lot was being said to the credit of the craftsman who had carved out the weapon. The Abos also collected the usual for some fish ("mud" mullet speared in the shallow water was all they had), and both canoe and boat parted company amidst salutations of good will, the nigs to their feast of 'gator and flying foxes, the Happy Family company on their way lest they be stuck on the mud for another tide.

In the river once more, and directly the outstanding feature of the Dome in on the port (or the travellers' left side) was passed, the old firm volunteering the information that the port side country onwards was now no longer a no-man's-land (although it certainly looked it), as the Bradshaw's Run boundary was somewhere hereabouts. And so for the next two days all the way to the Depot, the company travelled through those two tremendous areas, the river being the boundary between Bradshaw's along the northern bank, and Auvergne along the southern. From this western Bradshaw boundary (the Dome apparently was the landmark for same) the run stretched eastward "as the crow flies" about seventy miles, way beyond the Depot. It seemed there was no end to the vast area of these stations, and of course the new arrivals to the North were deeply impressed.

However, this day's travelling through the Mosquito Flats and Whirlwind Plains to either bank was slow and tedious. It was a calm, hot, clammy day and the mosquitos and sandflies were something abominable. The old firm Joe and George recommended a sump oil balm freely applied, which was gladly indulged in by all hands, including even the boys. George's knowledge of the channel was not of much assistance here, as the current moved the sands about (much of it quicksand) and the channel shifted its position every other day. The boat became stuck several times, and all spare hands were over the side
shoving or pulling to no end, meanwhile warily feeling for the quicksands and watching out for crocs, and the boys could be relied upon to keep a good watch out for the latter. There was one fright and a speedy scramble to get back into the boat, much to the amusement of the crew boys, as the 'gator was really off in the opposite direction in a great fright.

And so in the early afternoon the boat became stuck on a sandbank with the tide going the wrong way, and nothing could be done but camp and make the best of it until the incoming tide late the following morning. No travelling at night in these difficult channels, 'twould have been extremely foolish, and so the incoming overnight tide was wasted, the company being content to move into calm deep water and kedge. Little distance was travelled this day, but one important event happened, the sequence of which in this story has been temporarily overlooked (a slip all too easily made when recalling events of half a century back): that of the Bradshaw homestead being passed, situated on a rise some hundreds of yards back from the river, adjacent to the Ikymbon River (although present day official maps call it the Angalarri, with the Ikymbon flowing into same higher up) which flows into the Victoria on the north side, that was, on our travellers' port side. George pointed out Bradshaw's Tomb, a bare and rugged range to the back of the homestead. Today it reminds Young Bill of all he has read of the lonely tomb of Cecil Rhodes in the wild Rhodesian Mountains of South Africa, and that of the late Reverend John Flynn, much revered by old Australian pioneers as "Flynn of the Inland", or the more popular sobriquet of "The Flying Doctor", one of whose memorials is the huge bassalt boulder beside the Stuart Highway north of Alice Springs.

A couple of distant horsemen were waved to, who acted as if they were anxious to approach the river, for a yarn of course (they were tailing
some cattle), and Joe thought about it for a minute. It was etiquette by unwritten law to do so, but he was anxious to get on, remarking as a soother to his conscience that he would "pull in for a yarn on the return trip", oil was running pretty low, and as a matter of fact it was. Incidentally, George instantly recognised the two white men through the glasses. It suddenly occurred to Harry Jones and Young Bill that other than the boat's company, these were the first white men observed since leaving Port Darwin, during some hundreds of miles' travelling. Moreover, the Happy Family company could have been the first strange white men the Bradshaw stockmen had seen in months. No wonder they appeared anxious for the usual yarn, and the boat's company felt a little small for depriving them of same.

Sometime after dark whilst stuck on the sandbank in this position, the second night since leaving Blunder Bay, the new arrivals were treated to the experience of the incoming tide rushing up the river from the tremendous volume of Queen's Channel at the river's entrance, forcing the fifteen to twenty feet high tide into and up the comparatively narrow river, and thence all the way up to just above the Depot. The advance tidal wave, up to two or three feet high (in the vernacular referred to as the "bore") could be heard coming for quite some time, and could have been disturbing enough to our inexperienced newcomers in their "stuck on the bank" predicament, had they not had the experienced "old firm" to reassure them, for Joe and George took it in their stride, just a matter of letting out sufficient cable to allow the boat, which of course faced the bore nose on, a chance to lift. Meanwhile all spare hands assembling on the stern with other handy movable deck cargo, to help the bow to rise sufficiently to the new level. It was all over in a few seconds, but the tide rose very rapidly for an hour or two.

In the full moon the rising river and setting made a fascinating
picture for the gathering who lounged around the (somewhat) anti-mosquito fire and listened to George's tale of Bradshaw's Run (herewith corrected and somewhat brought up to date from records available). Bradshaw's Run was founded in the eighties by Captain (maritime) "Joe" Bradshaw, an English financier, ex-windjammer captain, Australian pioneer grazier come adventurer and popular all-round jolly good fellow, who had already lost a lot of money trying to settle on the wild Kimberley coast, together with similar interests in wildest Arnhem Land. Added to the difficulty of the country, extreme isolation, and a most adverse climate over the several months of the wet, the wild blacks proved a serious problem, and like the Auvergne country, the environment lent itself to their demonstrating their resentment of the white man occupying their hunting grounds: it was good hit and run skirmishing country. But Captain Joe was used to commanding tough men in the old windjammers, and he had just such a mixed international group with him now for the pioneering of his newly selected country, and both Captain and shellbacks being well used to regular watches at sea under all sorts of conditions and circumstances, immediately settled down to a round the clock system of sentry watches and reliefs, and so eventually progress was made against severe odds. But amongst this roughneck group was "Ivan the Terrible" (of whom we have already written) who eventually established such a resentment amongst the blacks, that they eventually caught up with him in the massacre at Port Keats.

Sheep were tried out for a start on Bradshaw, but of course they soon proved a failure, not the least deterrent being the depredations of the myalls who speedily grew overfond of mutton. They also greatly prized the shear blades for their spear heads. The Big Run, Victoria River Downs, had already unsuccessfully tried some sheep out, eventually selling the remains of the flock to Captain Joe. In due course the
station was successful with cattle, particularly under Aeneas Gunn's management during the nineties (A. Gunn later of *We of the Never Never* fame, was incidentally a cousin of Bradshaw's). Like Auvergne, Bradshaw's Run had its pioneering tragedies. Two men, Byers and Inwood, travelling through the vast belt of lonely country from civilisation to the run, were swallowed up without trace. Probably became bushed or ill, or both, and perished; or ambushed and killed by the blacks. No trace whatever was ever found of them.

In the station's graveyard are buried several men and women, some who died because medical help was too many hundreds of miles away to obtain. Amongst them rests the bones of a one time bank manager by name of Palmer. How and why he changed from that profession to a stockman out in that wild country is anyone's guess (although similar cases out the Territory way were not so unusual). Poor Palmer was mauled by a crocodile whilst swimming in the river, and if he did have any chance of survival it was ruled out by the handicap of being hundreds of miles from the phone and a doctor. But of course, all too many similar cases of those early days are recorded, although the Reverend John Flynn and his dedicated work in instigating the Flying Doctor Service together with Bush Nursing Societies, plus telephone and two-way wireless, motor and air transport etc. have gradually relieved the hardships the past few decades.

The writer has been unable to trace (other than the killings of Port Keats and Daly river, in both of which Ivan the Terrible was apparently the chief cause) any recorded actual conflict on Bradfield [Bradshaw] between blacks and whites, but there must have been casualties on both sides, and many more so as usual of course, amongst the blacks. Some very interesting complications arose out of the necessity of bringing the perpetrators to white man's justice, particularly in the Daly River.
case, and some of it makes very interesting reading, and although we have already somewhat touched on the subject, we propose to pursue the matter further.

It may be remembered, Ivan and another white man, "Old" Larsen, along with some Victoria River crew boys were cruising on one of the Bradshaw launches (the Captain ran two or three, including a small steamer) for some purpose, when suddenly they were attacked at night (there had been trouble with the natives, over women as usual). Old Larsen and the three crew boys were killed outright (or so Ivan declared on being picked up) and their bodies thrown into the river. Ivan claimed he was knocked overboard, but climbing into the launch's tethered dinghy, he cut the painter, and although without oars managed to escape. He was picked up on the river the following morning by a Darwin lugger on its way to the Copper Mine and the Jesuit Mission.

Police constables Messrs Stott and Stone were dispatched from Darwin to the Daly to investigate and make arrests etc... On arriving at the Daly the police solicited help of the Jesuit Mission boys and their women, then cruised down the river (that was towards the river's mouth, a Police Station having been sometime established a hundred miles or so up the river). Two salt-water boys, Mungkum and Kammipur, willingly confessed to the killings, and they seemed proud of their achievement. A "truthful" (as it turned out) mission girl, Dorah, acted as interpreter. These two "confession" boys declared they supplied Ivan's party with women as requested, but the promised tobacco was not forthcoming. During an argument over the matter, Ivan, on being hit with a waddy, at once jumped overboard, swam to the dinghy and cut the painter, then made off leaving Larsen and the three boys to their fate. The two boys then led the police to where the launch Wunwulla lay scuttled and "stripped" in the mangroves. Eventually these boys again
confessed their guilt in the Darwin Coroner's Court and were remanded to the Supreme Court on a charge of wilful murder. At this stage, Russian Ivan turned up hotfoot in Darwin from Bradshaw's Run with the astounding news that the real killers were the three Victoria River crew boys, and were the murderers of Old Larsen. They had returned per foot to the Victoria, loaded down with gear from the scuttled launch and boasting of having killed Larsen and the much hated Ivan too (as they then apparently imagined), and seemed much amused that the Daly River boys, mere lookers-on, were going to be punished for the crime.

In due course, Father O'Brien of the Daly Jesuit Mission interrogated his flock and obtained the truth, that the two boys had made confession of the killings to get even with the two investigating police, because they considered them a couple of over confident know-alls, and needed taking down a peg or two. It appeared all the Daly River blacks were enjoying a good laugh at the expense of the police who had arrested the wrong men, and apparently they were not a bit concerned about the predicament of the two tribesmen who were running the risk of being hung. They anyway, were having a good holiday for the meantime on white man's fare. These related happenings of dealings of this nature between police and Aborigines were not altogether unusual, but this particular case is rather a classic of same.

Constable Stott with a police party were now shipped off to the Victoria and landed at Bradshaw's. The hunt was on for the three killers, and Ivan the Terrible (and probably enough other white men) rode with them. The three wanted men, "Dick", "Little George", and the ringleader "Big George", having been warned per smoke of the approach of "Pleeece", had of course well and truly cleared out. Dick was caught without much trouble. Then after a tremendous amount of travelling and "galloping" camps of well-armed myalls down - and it invariably paid off
best when they were sleepy and generally unalert at "sparrow chirp" (first sign of developing daylight) - Little George was captured. They were kept under guard and chained to a tree at the Bradshaw homestead. Big George had cleared right out to far and almost unaccessable rugged ranges. But Stott's head police tracker "Dandy" was very good at his calling (and in an environment where all coloured men and some whites were good at that ability), and eventually after hundreds of miles of difficult tracking Big George was run to earth, endeavouring to escape down the face of a cliff. As his pursuers fired he fought back with his primitive weapons. Hit, he fell some considerable way down the cliff, picked himself up and staggered on, and then was shot dead by Dandy.

Dick and Little George were tried at Darwin and Dick was sentenced to be hung back at Bradshaw's and same to be witnessed by as many of his tribesmen as practicable, as a deterrent against killings etc.. When it came to the actual hanging not an Aborigine could be found anywhere, they had all cleared out again, so the boy was hung with only whites to look on, if they cared to. The old hands declared (several of the later confirming same to Harry Jones and Young Bill) that Ivan the Terrible enjoyed the hanging immensely, and when news of his sadistic glee was passed on to the tribesmen, their countenances registered hatred and bitter words of revenge were uttered. What became of Little George we do not know?! Probably had a few years' holiday at Fanny Bay Gaol, then spent the rest of his life in and around Darwin. How the Victoria River tribesmen caught up with the Russian Ivan (unfortunately taking in several other white men in their stride) at Port Keats some two years later, has already been related.

However, the tragedy eventually ended on a humorous note, for in later years the spirit of Ivan the Terrible came back to Bradshaw to literally point the bone at the tribesmen and sing them to death, and it happened
thus. Came a time when the Bradshaw homestead, somewhat neglected for years, fell a prey to white ants, and a new one was built using hundreds of lengths of iron piping that Ivan the Terrible, just before his death, had started to use in an irrigation system to run water from a distant spring in the hills to the vegetable garden at the homestead. The new home completed went off very well during the first winter, but it seems that frogs had been breeding and hibernating in the hollow piping, and when summer and the wet season set in they woke up properly and the roaring noise of the croaking they eventually put up was apparently something to be imagined. It blasted the inhabitants right out of the place after many sleepless nights and half silly with the incessant infernal croaking, for there were many thousands of the pests.

The whites moved out to the store and outbuildings, and the native house boys and girls panicked back to their tribesmen, frightened and scared of the terrible din. The panic spread no end when the tribes realised their old enemy Ivan had come back in the spirit and was virtually pointing the bone at them and singing them to death (for they considered the iron pipes were the property and invention of Ivan). So once again, every tribesmen within very many miles of Bradshaw's homestead cleared out for the hills.⁴

Bradshaw's Run, in spite of severe difficulties, prospered in its time, running to double figures in thousands of cattle, and well-bred horses were also reared in numbers. But it declined in later years along with other stations, mainly through adverse markets for too many

⁴See Hill, The Territory, pp.249-50, 254. The name of the launch and of the two men originally arrested have been changed to comply with Hill's spelling. The spellings in the typescript are "Wanwalla", "Mangham", and "Kummpur".
years. Captain Joe Bradshaw was apparently dogged by hard luck in his other northern ventures, not the least of it being the depredations of the wild blacks, especially in and around Arnhem Land where his herds were hounded and speared for some years, by the thousands. 'Tis said he died a lonely old man (apparently he never married) in Darwin Hospital in 1919.
But to continue the Happy Family voyage from where the company were stuck on the sandbank for the night, the second night's "camp" since leaving Blunder Bay at the mouth of the river. Waiting through the earlier part of the morning for the incoming tide, the crew boys amused the lads with an exposition of spear fishing (the only weapons the boys were allowed on board). Burley was thrown overboard, and then the boys posed like statues with poised spears, and in spite of sandflies, ordinary flies, mosquitos and other pests, it was really remarkable how long they could remain absolutely motionless, and when they struck for a fish they very rarely missed.

The last of the sandbanks were soon left behind this day, the river becoming, well, more like a river, with well-defined banks generally fringed with mangrove, and was anything from one to three hundred yards wide. The country was more of a pastoral nature now, and occasionally stock were spotted. One more night on the river, and the fourth day was a pleasant enough run to the Depot where the company was vociferously greeted by popular Matt Wilson and a couple of other whites, and a large enough group of semi-civilised blacks, most of them clad in something or other. The old hands reckoned it had been a very good trip, George declaring it was the best run he had ever made up the river, made possible by spring tides and just enough "fresh" coming down to keep the shallow spots a little deeper than usual, but not strong enough to retard progress.

Shortly after reaching the Depot, Gregory's Boab Trees, three of them, were passed on the starboard side: all large trees and looking very ancient. Some of the markings could be plainly read through the glasses, such as "letter in forge", and "1855", the year of Gregory's
camp there. Apparently the explorer Gregory, on the lookout for Doctor Leichhardt's lost party, and much other information ref. pastoral potentiality etc., made this spot his head camp for some eight months. Gregory explored way up around the source of the Victoria and discovered Sturt Creek, and much else.  

It was at Gregory's Boabs that a mob of blacks were waiting to welcome the Happy Family, and walked along the bank keeping level with the boat, yack-ai-ing and jumping into the air, and having one heck of a time worked up with excitement at the arrival of the expected visitors, for of course they had been informed per a smoke of the boat's progress. The Depot had been founded a little above Gregory's old camp in the late seventies or early eighties. The tidal waters ended a little higher up where there was a crossing, or ford. Matt Wilson, whose previous address had apparently been anywhere in outback Queensland or South Australia, arrived on the Victoria about 1901, following his old friend and droving associate Jim Ronan, who took over the management of the Big Run (V.R.D.) about the turn of the century. Besides the interests of the store, Matt had acquired a small area of country (small by Victoria River standards) and bred a few cattle and horses. His store (a permanent one) was perhaps the most unique of its kind in all Australia in the way of being so very isolated from more settled civilisation, for other than enjoying the protection of the Timber Creek Police Station some two or three miles off, the Big Run, Auvergne and Bradshaw's were respectively eighty, forty, and thirty-five miles away (or near enough

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The Depot Landing, Victoria River: "Matt's numerous and well-fed and 'tobaccoed' wharfies carried the loading up the bank to Bert Drew's waiting wagon."
(The Australian Archives, Darwin.)

Matt Wilson's Store, Victoria River Depot, c.1911: "...perhaps the most unique of its kind in all Australia, in the way of being so very isolated from more settled civilisation."
(Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Australia.)
for those times). Matt was hundreds of miles from a railway, telephone or township of any description, and mechanical transport and decent roads (to say nothing of aeroplanes and wireless) was still a vision of the future, and during the wet season, say from November-December to March-April, Matt's store was just about cut off altogether from the outside world, and even the packhorse mail in a bad wet could be held up for some months.

The Happy Family cargo of emergency stores were expected. Tucker was running low at the Big Run and also at Matt's, and two of Bert Drew's donkey teams had been waiting for the arrival of the rations for some weeks. The Happy Family tied up at the little wharf (of sorts) and plans for immediate unloading were started as Kimberley Joe was anxious to get away down river again before the spring tides petered out.

The "tucker" loading was broached that evening, Matt having some arrangement with "Dicky" Townshend (popular manager of the Big Run) to borrow a quantity of whatever he was short of, but apparently he couldn't make it "too hot", for as Bert Drew (the donkey teamster) remarked, the "Wave" (Wave Hill station) was pretty low in tucker too: "Gotta get down there from the Big Run soon's I can." (Incidentally, it was reckoned about eighty miles between the Big Run and the Wave homesteads, the latter being just about south of the former.)

That night there was great feasting (Matt had a beast killed ready for the occasion), the whites and more civilised Abos round one fire, the rest of the nigs including near myalls a little way off round another; and as the night advanced and the firewater (not too much) got round, a ding-dong corroboree went on until near daylight the following morning. Yes, Matt opened up several bottles of good whisky from his latest ration issue, remarking that it was clandestinely "booked to the Big Run
as horseshoes anyway" (a popular method with managers out that way of including a greater amount of luxuries amongst the rations than the owners allowed). Matt passed out enough whisky to give all the Abos a good nip, and no more, explaining for the benefit of the new arrivals to the North what a mistake it was to give them too much, as "under the influence" their wild nature exerted itself, causing them to run amuck altogether and start serious fighting and worse. The newcomers already knew all this, but they realised it was better to let the old-timers think they were passing on good advice for the first time (that was for the recipient of same), and 'twas wise to assume an attitude of appreciation by way of thanking them for their helpful gestures. In short, it did the old-timers good, and the new arrivals no harm, and often a lot of good. One of the Northern Territory police troopers rode over from Timber Creek for a yarn in the evening and was immediately accepted as one of the company (the usual thing apparently), and he showed much interest in our heroes, inviting them to drop in on the station and have a look round.

As can be imagined, some great tales of the early Territory, and up-to-date also, were told at this gathering (and incidentally at all similar ones). Apparently it wasn't absolutely necessary (thought the mates) to "travel" overmuch to learn all about the "real" Territory, for it was "on tap" at these gatherings of old-timers and new arrivals, the former letting themselves go and talking more when they sensed the latter were, well, more than interested; fascinated would be the better description.

When the lads were warmed up a little on Matt's hospitality, they accepted the invitation to look in on the blacks' corroboree, taking their mouth organs along with them. The corroboree was well worth seeing, only that some of the participants hadn't bothered with overmuch
make-up. Of course most of them were stark naked. The dance was apparently meant to be a happy one that could be indulged in at any time by all members of the tribe (but only the males actually danced) and from the gestures it represented good hunting and plenty of tucker. Much stamping of feet, yack-ai-ing and jumping high into the air, to the accompaniment of the didgeridoos and bullroarers, and the women and piccaninnies clicking kylies, or slapping their thighs in unison; and it went on and on, now and again dwindling to a low tempo, then gradually working up to almost frenzy, as it were. The mates were impressed, it was a truly wild and absorbing scene. Eventually the song man (leader in the changing, chanting, sometimes in a high treble, at others in a deep bass) suddenly terminated the dance and after fraternising for a few minutes, invited the lads to strike up on the mouth organs. As already remarked, the mates were feeling pretty good with just enough of the Big Run's confiscated firewater under their belts, and didn't take much persuading, playing together. Then Jonsey playing popular airs to Bill's singing, and then Bill played whilst Jonsey roared his favourite, "There's a pretty spot in Ireland". Everything went over tremendously, and the visitors were made much of. Later the lads realised they were being referred to and addressed as didgeedoo (as pronounced) and bullroarer (later more often shortened to "Didgee" and "Roarer"), and on enquiry reference same, a great roar went up from the boys whilst it was explained in pidgin and pantomime that Bill's playing was similar to the didgeedoo, and Jonsey's singing resembled the bullroarer. Incidentally, in the following months, those nicknames followed, nay, often preceded the lads' movements right across the Territory and north to Borroloola, and that was as far as the Abos were concerned: they had a nickname for any and all the whites, some of them not too complimentary.

7"Boorooloola" in original. All subsequent spellings have been changed without notice, except where otherwise indicated.
The usual inevitable cadging went on, gathering momentum as the visit wore on. They (the Abos) had tasted spirits and wanted more, and there were also many pressing requests for "toobac". Their usual bartering stock in trade was freely offered, and a non-interested reception of same offer somewhat nonplussed them. And so the lads thought they would not overstay their welcome, and rejoined their own group.

Matt was "holding the floor" at the moment, counting his blessings re his existence in his present environment, one of them being the presence for years of his only neighbours the police at Timber Creek (some few miles off) who had "educated" the blacks around the district since the "early" days, and he'd never had any very serious trouble with them. Matt admitted that of course he had always let it be known he kept a loaded rifle handy, especially when outside "near" myalls occasionally came in, particularly the Fitzmaurice River and salt-water blacks. (This country lay well to the north and north-west of the Depot.) Matt then went on to admit that of course amongst the scrub and ranges "way on either side of the river" he wouldn't be fool [enough] to ride unless well armed. "Yes, revolver and rifle, and at the ready," and never rode alone if he could possibly avoid doing so: this latter information in reply to the mates' pertinent questions. As a matter of fact Matt had the reputation of always treating the natives fairly, albeit firmly enough too when occasion arose. This was the position as regards Matt and the blacks when our heroes dropped in at the Depot just on half a century ago, and Matt was still on duty there until well after the Second World War. He is buried handy there in the little "cemetary", lonely and deserted now, the Depot long falling into ruins, having

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8 The words "and now Old Bill reviewing that situation in retrospect" here deleted.
outlived its usefulness with the advent of good roads and motor transport.\footnote{Wilson's headstone by the Victoria Highway near Timber Creek indicates that he died on 28 January, 1931.} It was a remarkable instance of a lone white man existing amongst the blacks ("civilised" to outright myalls) in such environment for so long and "getting along" so well with them.

Furthermore the natives were always under the temptation to pilfer the store, a temptation that often led to premeditated violence in the "good old" pioneering days. Likely enough more often than not, Matt would have white company of some sort: any land traffic between Darwin and Wyndham (Western Australia), (generally there would be very little, and none at all during the wet) would of course call at the Depot when using the adjacent river crossing, and it was the central gathering place for campers and spree parties etc., and there was always the big Picnic Race Meeting near the end of the dry, which was the most important social event of the year for hundreds of miles round.

But to get back to Matt holding forth round the camp fire: he now started on his earlier life, what time he became a big man in the Labour movement amongst the striking shearers in their battle for better conditions way back in the big strike of the early nineties. Matt was leader in a striking shearers' camp on the bank of the Thomson River at Longreach, central Queensland. (Young Bill had visited the big waterhole when back at the Reach, and had heard the local garbled legend of the scuttled firearms.) The strikers were well armed with rifles etc., and soldiers and police were due to "show the colours" of law and order in the district. The position seemed dangerous Matt thought. Many (too many) of the strikers were openly declaring they would not
hesitate to use their firearms if the police or soldiery interfered with them in any way. It says much of Matt's wisdom and leadership that he persuaded his following to dump their rifles etc. in a certain waterhole, and thereby created a situation whereby the armed police and soldiery met a body of peaceful unarmed men, which caused them to feel somewhat embarrassed and silly, or so Matt reckoned anyway. He declared his most difficult problem was to persuade the more lawless element from burning down too many woolsheds etc. Like so many bushmen, Matt was a good talespinner. Furthermore he was a little hard of hearing, and if he didn't want to hear a difficult question or embarrassing criticism, well, he just "couldn't"(?), and went right on with his tale, or so it was humorously remarked by many. But Matt was popular and had many friends.

The following morning, unloading the Happy Family was early in full swing, Matt receiving some ten tons of loading (all foodstuffs, except as already explained, luxuries "rung in" as nails, hobble chains etc.) on behalf of V.R.D.. Matt's numerous and well fed and "tobaccoed" wharfies carried the loading up the bank to Bert Drew's waiting wagons, and the lads finding themselves in the way as regards a job (for of course the boys did all the manual work), set off for a pleasant walk to the police station at Timber Creek. The creek emptied into the Victoria, and the surrounding country was a just pleasant enough picture of open rolling downs and hills, some rocky enough, with just enough timber, predominantly coolabah, the grass and herbage green and rank enough, and Matt's cattle and horses looked fat and sleek.

The writer does not know when Timber Creek Station was actually
Timber Creek Police Station: "Here the lads had their first view of chained Abo. prisoners, several of them being secured neck to neck around a shady coolabah tree."

"There was some magnificent grazing country within the boundary of the Big Run, and a lot of rangy country too."
founded, but the South Australian Government had a force of Aboriginal mounted "killers" specially trained at Alice Springs. They were officially designated black trackers, as since the brutal methods of the Queensland Native Mounted Police had been condemned by a Royal Commission in 1861, no government of any state [colony] dared to openly allow the formation of any similar body. Nearly all of the black trackers were serving or ex-convicts (cattle spearers, tribesmen murderers and worse) and care was taken that they were from widely dispersed tribes, so that too much sympathy would not be practised one for the other, or for tribesmen being hunted. Thus a thief was set to catch a thief.

Their first assignment was to "ride the ranges" against the killers of the four European miners at the Daly River Copper Mine in 1884 (the same year as the detachment was formed). In due course these black troopers (for that is just what they were) under their white leaders, caught up with the Victoria River cattle spearing (and worse) blacks who had been causing much havoc among the mobs, by spearing and mutilating thousands of beasts every year. Apparently the last big raid by these black police occurred in 1894 (ten years following their formation) and it was very "successful". It is highly likely that at least sometimes during these activities the Timber Creek site was used as a main camp or depot. Of course the site of the Victoria River Depot (which later included Matt's store) could have been selected as a local headquarters for the police station, but naturally those people, one would think, would prefer a little more privacy, and so selected Timber Creek.

10 A report from the Timber Creek Police Station first appeared in the annual Government Resident's report for 1898. Northern Territory, Government Resident's Report For The Northern Territory, 1898, SAPP No.45, 1899, p.23. Previously, reports had been forwarded from the Gordon Creek site.
Apparently when the fleeing blacks were eventually tracked down and practically surrounded, the white leaders more or less withdrew and left the slaughter to the black trackers who shot the hunted people down as so much vermin, the innocent with the guilty, and often enough women and children included if they happened to be up amongst their men-folk. As usual in such cases, there were some shocking instances of wholesale slaughter: murder would be the more appropriate phrase. And again as usual, popular alarm and disgust throughout the more settled parts of Australia, on belatedly realising the Aboriginal population was on the way to a more speedy extermination (for it must be remembered it was then believed that the Aborigines were definitely and permanently a fast disappearing race) endeavoured to bring some of the more overzealous killers to law and justice. But again as usual, the far out settlers who were being harried, and worse, by the blacks, cooperated clandestinely in a "no talk, no conviction juries" campaign (and they apparently believed wholeheartedly in their cause) and were so successful that no convictions could be effected.

And once more we may remark, there were two sides to the question. The Aborigines were by any standard of reasoning, practising some diabolical activities, and some of the whites set no worthy example in their treatment of the blacks, to say the least. Jungle law of the survival of the fittest was not frowned on nearly so much those times as it is today in the nineteen sixties. In "the good old days" it was apparently considered just and proper to confiscate the Aboriginals' country and drive them out of it to lingering racial extermination and worse. Well nigh a century had to go by before the realisation was gradually understood that the Aborigines were morally entitled to certain fundamental human rights. The whole problem in the not too distant past ref. these people has been a dark page in Australia's
story. Thank heaven we are now over those "good old days", and enjoy living in the nineteen sixties.

At the time of our hero's visit, not too many police stations in Australia were minus telephone connection, but Timber Creek was one of them. Furthermore it was some two hundred and fifty miles travelling to same, Wyndham or "Th'overland" (Darwin to Adelaide Telegraph Line). Here the lads had their first view of chained Abo. prisoners, several of them being secured neck to neck around a shady coolabah tree. The mates of course had heard all about this sort of thing. It was apparently a good idea under the circs, the boys being free to use their hands in any way. There had been agitation from the South against this "inhuman" idea, but in practice it was the most humane method available, and was not an excessive hardship for the blacks, their being used to exposure, naked, in all sorts of weather. They were a mixed looking lot, from villainous and sullen to happy and cheerful. The most cheerful looking boy was up for "killem dead" (just plain "killem" would explain a wounding only, but "killem dead" meant a genuine killing), a tribal affair over a woman, probably legal under the circs by their own tribal law, but by the white man's he would be tried for murder or manslaughter, and get a few years in Fanny Bay. Unlike the chaining method just mentioned, this part of the white man's system of trying the myall Aborigines by the same law governing white men was all wrong, and was thought so at the time. It's nice to know that all that has been straightened out far as practical. However, handcuffs later superseded neck chains. The writer agrees with the old hands that the chains were definitely more humane and desirable, but handcuffs seemed the more humane, to people who had never witnessed the difference: freedom of movement for the hands, which enabled the chained to keep the flies from their eyes, brush irritating scrub from their path, and many more
conveniences that would be well nigh impossible to a boy wearing handcuffs. These prisoners were awaiting escort to Darwin, as opportunity offered.

Bert Drew's donkey teams were hitched up ready for the road the following morning, two of them, and there was a third out on the roads somewhere: drawn by some thirty donkeys when light loaded, and by forty or more when necessary. Of course Bert had the assistance of several boys with their belongings and relations (and he could have had fifty), odd ones very good. Bert, like his contemporary Matt Wilson, was a little hard of hearing, but as he preferred talking to listening, and he could talk most interestingly on a wide enough range of subjects and was well enough "read", [he] was considered good company. Many were the humourous stories told of the two somewhat deaf friends in conversation one with the other, and to the disadvantage of either or both. Incidentally Matt was also "well read", and apparently always had literature on hand to loan or exchange. Young Bill had found he had something here in common with Matt. He had always been fond of reading himself (a hobby that he pursued right through to well advanced years, at least). Bill was glad to be able to hand Matt a couple of volumes, and receive the same from him, and a couple extra on "loan" (gratis, mind you) but guaranteed to be returned when done with, "along with anything else yer happen ter have on hand, I can always do with plenty here."

It appeared Matt swapped and loaned hundreds of books in this way, and most of the loaned ones eventually got back to the Depot, anything from weeks to a couple of years later. It was remarkable how many one met out that way in possession of literature borrowed from Matt: "One of Matt Wilson's" was an oft heard saying. It was unwritten law out in those parts, a borrowed book must be returned in good order. It was on
a par with honouring I.O.U's of any variety. A man that slipped up on those and similar matters was a marked man, ostracised to the necessary degree to fit the "crime", from one end of the Territory to the other. But as remarked, defaulting on such matters was the rare exception, at least in those days.

Bert travelled some twelve to fifteen miles a day when not too heavily loaded. The first night's camp was made at the Dingo Springs. Mostly the usual odd names were noted along the track, the Five Mile, the Ten Mile and so on, represented by a fine clump of coolabah, a tabletopped outcrop or a gnarled old "bottle tree" (boab); also such names as Skull Creek and Bob's Grave Creek, and so on. Bert had a good tale to tell about all of them in turn.

But the best story of this track of course, was that of the myalls' attack on the two teamsters Ligar and Mulligan at the "T.K." camp situated just before entering Jasper Gorge. Here an old boab tree was marked with the initials of the overlander and pioneer grazier, Tom Kilfoyle. Everybody in the North knew all about this "battle", but very few people in the South remembered anything about it. Back in '95, before there was any habitation at Timber Creek or the Depot (apparently the black police had camped near Timber Creek for a time, some years earlier, and they would considerably tame the myalls, although the latter was being used for transferring the river lighters' cargos to the teamsters' wagons), the two horse teamsters mentioned and their "boys" were camped just clear of the western entrance to Jasper Gorge, roughly about halfway between the Big Run (V.R.D.) homestead and the Depot (apparently it was always called the Depot at least since explorer Gregory occupied the sight in '56). The wagons had been loaded at the Depot of course, with stores for the Big Run and the Wave (Wave Hill station). Before sundown some half myalls arrived on the cadge
(probably offering the usual trade), and mated up with the teamsters' boys. It appears that the visitors knew all about the white man's firewater and begged for same, a usual enough procedure those days. Our talespinner made it quite clear that in his opinion at least, the whites were later probably more or less under the influence, which would help to throw them off their guard against possible treacherous attack from the blacks.

It appears the attack was well planned and the teamsters' boys were well "in on it". The mixed camp company were settled down well after sunset, the whites comfortably busy with camp routine and the blacks singing and dancing in corroboree as usual under the circls, when suddenly the "music" and dancing stopped dead: it was the signal for the visitors and the camp boys to scatter and a group of nearby hiding myalls to attack. Showers of spears now began to fall about the camp. In the next very few minutes Ligar sustained a glass headed lance through the nose and a stone headed spear in the back, and Mulligan was speared in the thigh by a sheep shear headed "shovel-nosed" weapon, a nasty enough wound. (The shear blade would have been "souvenired" from Bradshaw's Run where they had been trying out some sheep as an experiment.) But these two whites were examples of the toughest and most resourceful of the early pioneers of the North. Irish and German blood (to say nothing of any other fighting strain) apparently flowed in their veins, and the writer, harking back to his experiences out on that "frontier line" of those times, these "characters" amongst other types could be very tough and full of fight when necessary (and often enough when not necessary).

And so they fought back for their lives. The spears were either "worked" out or broken off short; what time [sic] they built a barricade with the stores and blazed away into the night and all the following
day, the blacks besieging them from the cover of nearby ridges, occasionally hurling spears and other weapons, and now and again there was a shot or two from their own boys, who got away with rifles but fortunately couldn't use them. But the fire from the whites must have been fairly effective, for the night following the attack, feeling "done" and realising they would have to break out to save their lives (Ligar was now coughing blood and the stone spearhead having penetrated his lung, and the glass spear tip was still embedded in his nose)\^11 by the darkness of night and shooting at anything and everything, they carried their saddles out of the "stockade" and managed to secure two of their lighter draught-horses (a great wonder they were left in peace by the besiegers!) and in great pain rode some fifty miles or so to Auvergne station. The worst was over, but it was some weeks before they reached the necessary medical aid in Darwin; and the glass spear tip was still in Ligar's nose.

One mounted Northern Territory policeman and a score of well armed "bushmen" in due course "rode the bush and ranges", and there was terrible retribution; grim memories for the "riders" down through the years. But truthful details of what actually happened on these primitive expeditions, very seldom "came down" in history.

Strangely enough, the blacks failed to loot the cased grog on the wagons, and for the reason that they could not read the branding ref. the contents, being the popular explanation of the oversight. But saddlery, guns, clothing etc., were found scattered throughout the bush and ranges. Mulligan and Ligar eventually recovered, the former dying "out there" at Ferguson River, and probably Ligar (who finished up

\^11 The word "but" here deleted.
Jasper Gorge: "At times the cliffs ... closed in as if they would envelope the very teams."

Jasper Creek: "... it had to be crossed several times at varying angles, sometimes two or three times a mile."
terribly disfigured with his facial spear wound), is also resting out there somewhere, perhaps in an unknown grave.\footnote{12}{Apparently Jim Ligar's grave is in a bend of the Ord River, East Kimberley's. [See Hill, \textit{The Territory}, p.432.]} And Bert Drew finished up his tale by making the point that it was a very good job for the niggers they did not have the time to discover the cased grog. Had they done so, there would have been a debacle of debauchery and murder amongst themselves, comparable to the similar attack on the Kimberley teamsters just across the border in Western Australia, when the semi-civilised and myalls secured and broached a heavy supply of grog.\footnote{13}{See Searcy, \textit{In Australian Tropics}, pp.204-05, for an account of the Jasper Gorge raid. There are no obvious connections with Lavender's description.}

Now Bert Drew with his donkey teams tackled the famous Jasper Creek Gorge, a nervy and hazardous trip by any standard, but Bert had apparently been over it dozens of times, or should one say through it. Jasper Creek ran through the gorge and eventually into the Victoria River, and it had to be crossed several times at varying angles, sometimes two of three times a mile. The track rose and fell away at the most frightening angles, and at times it seemed, to Harry Jones and Young Bill at any rate, a wonder that the wagons didn't turn over. However, to show their faith in Bert's judgement, they clung to the load along with the boys "following", all hands moving over to the high side when the wagon began to angle over on a precarious stretch of road. At times the cliffs, hundreds of feet high, closed in as if they would envelop the very teams. But Bert, although high strung to a degree, seemed cool and confident, which is tantamount to saying so were his boys and the donkeys also. But of course Bert was an old hand at the
game and had been over this track so often. The Lads suspected that Bert was also showing off a little for the benefit of the new arrivals from the South. The same new arrivals had thought whilst loading up at the Depot, that Bert was a bit over fussy packing and securing the load, paying much attention to roping everything down well, but 'twas now realised how necessary was his thoroughness in this regard.

It was about eight miles through the gorge and Bert, remarking the flies and heat not being so bad, decided to halt the teams somewhere near halfway through for a bit of a spell, and boil the billy of course. An amusing incident happened here that put everybody in a good humour for at least the rest of the day. The people coming along with the second team were apparently lucky enough(?) to secure a couple of fair-sized rock pythons, and handed one to the boys' gins of the leading team, who immediately proceeded to dress same for roasting and dinner. The lads noticed a portion was specially treated, "for the whites" explained Bert, "in honour of you two blokes, and by golly you'll have to eat some of it." But for themselves (the Abos), they dropped the remainder of the snake "innards and all" just as they had killed it, into the ashes. Jonsey put on an act and swore he wouldn't touch the stuff but Bert, who was enjoying the fun, insisted he would have to tackle same and enjoy it, or the nigs would forever hold it against him. Meanwhile Bert's people were highly amused, the women giggling and yabbering away in their own dialect to no end. However, when it came to "taws", the whites' portion looked pretty good, clean white flesh, for all the world like pork or fish. The gins had plastered beef fat over it whilst roasting, and Bert produced some hot Worcestershire sauce and a raw onion or two. Believe it or not the whites tackled it, and had the lads not already known it was snake it would have passed for a coarse fish or "bush pork". However the knowledge that it was snake
resulted in its not being relished overmuch. Jonsey carried on his act and performed at every mouthful, and the blacks went into fits of laughter.

Shortly after emerging from the eastern end of the gorge, Bert pointed to another old boab and explained the party were just about over the boundary of the Big Run. Jonsey asked Bert how it came about that the myalls had never successfully attacked the whites from the cliff heights whilst the latter were travelling through the gorge, after the manner in which the Sikhs of India had attacked the British troops in the Khyber Pass, rolling tons of stones down on them the meanwhile. Bert explained, "strange!", but no travellers had ever been attacked that way whilst using the pass, but at times they had rolled heaps of stones down the cliff sides (examples of same had been observed by the mates along the gorge track), presumably with the idea of blocking the passage and deterring the whites from occupying their tribal country. However, the company agreed that the blacks had missed out on a good thing from their own point of view, and apparently there were no Napoleons amongst them. "Funny though!" Bert remarked, they had attacked white parties in their camp at night (generally at piccaninny daylight of course) just clear of the gorge at either end, and Bert then entertained his fellow travellers with the tale of an attack just clear of the eastern entrance of the pass. Bert's story will shortly be included in a description of the Big Run, as the whites involved were employees of that station. Bert explained there had been other brushes of more or less consequence some of them never reported officially, as it often involved the whites in a lot of time and bother at a time when they would be very busy, "too busy" to bother.

Bert had three wagons, and an unlimited supply of donkeys. They all seemed to have a name and Bert and the boys could pick any one of them
out. The mates wondered how. The donkeys had been doing a very good job, but that method of transport was shortly to be on the way out when mechanisation began to catch up with the motor truck about the late twenties. It is interesting at this juncture to note what became of Bert Drew's donkeys, and it may be understood how interested the writer was in a press article of only some months back (unfortunately the press article is not available for repetition) of how the American people who had recently acquired the station (what was left of it, some five or six thousand square miles)\textsuperscript{14} are to invest a very big sum of money in extensive improvements, which will enable what's left of the Big Run to carry something like more than twice the number of cattle than it did when the run was over twice the area. A start was already made in putting "shooters" on cleaning up the many thousands of wild camels, brumbies, mules, scrub bulls and not the least of the pests, the very many hundreds of descendants of the late Bert Drew's donkey teams which were "turned out" to roam free as Bert grew older and the motor lorry came more and more permanently into the picture.

Victoria River Downs station was taken up in the early eighties by a Melbourne syndicate, who of course had never seen the country (capitalists snapped up new country as fast as it was gazetted, just on "spec."). The area was officially thirteen thousand odd square miles (at that, larger than Belgium) but apparently [they] could make use of any area whenever suitable, of thousands of square miles out from the eastern boundary toward Th'overland (now long known as the Sturt Highway). Incidentally this state of affairs gave colour to the belief throughout the North for a few decades, that the area of the Big Run was fifteen thousand square miles. However at 13,150 it was still the

\textsuperscript{14}The word "and" is here deleted.
largest cattle station in the world, at least inside one continuous boundary and the one central management, and retained this title until about the mid-forties when the station was cut up, and the title (ref. the world's largest cattle station) passed to Alexandria Downs on the Barkly Tablelands.

The homestead was established in a roughly central position on the northern bank of the Wickham River, about seven miles from where it joined the mighty Victoria. The first loading arrived at the famous Depot per lugger from Darwin, and incidentally she was the third ship (if a lugger could be rated as such), the first being Commander Stokes' H.M.S. Beagle back in the forties, and the second explorer E. Gregory's schooner Tom Tough in the sixties. When founded, the homestead was about eighty miles by road from the Depot to the north, and the nearest habitation was Wave Hill station (the first area to be taken up on the Victoria) same distance, eighty miles to the south. Waterloo station boundary was somewhat the same distance to the west and at that time completely cut off by wild ranges occupied by wilder Aborigines. Waterloo was taken up by one of the group of original overlanders to the Western Australian Kimberleys, the Durack family and their relatives and friends. And to the east was nothing but waterless semi-desert for hundreds of miles to Th'overland. By the roads of those days, it was some three to four hundred miles to the amenities of civilisation, such as they were (and during the wet they could be much further), providing the roads were "useable" at all, and flooded rivers and creeks were fordable or not too dangerous to swim.

\[15\] A.C. Gregory explored the Victoria and surrounding regions in 1855-56.
There was some magnificent grazing country within the boundary of the Big Run, and a lot of rangey country too. It was considered to be exceptionally well-watered by the Big River and its network of tributaries, and one early manager was known to have declared there was enough country and water on the run for half a dozen stations. The same authority checked up on the longest east to west ride within the boundaries and made same one hundred and thirty-five miles. A similar north and south test worked out at ninety-four miles. Our authority is the late Jim Ronan, who preceded the late "Dicky" Townshend (managing the Big Run when Young Bill and Harry Jones were out that way in 1914. Goldsborough Mort the owners were then negotiating with Vestey Brothers ref. sale of the property to the latter).  

The working horses about this period, amounted to about five hundred head. The "boundary riders" of the Big Run were the poddy dodgers (in short cattle duffers) who manoeuvred around the boundaries of the outer settlement stations, cutting out the clean skins. They were probably the most adventurous type of bushmen Australia ever bred, and this by the very nature of their occupation. Jim Campbell, whom we have written so much of, was one of them, but in spite of a certain lady author's glorifying of him, he was not so popular, and downright disliked by many. However, our authority already mentioned considered these 'dodgers as fair enough boundary riders, well worth the comparatively few cleanskins etc. they got away with in return for keeping the station cattle within its boundaries, and the wild blacks out. Without these 'dodgers manager Jim Ronan reckoned there would have been many more cattle stampeded and speared, or strayed too far outside the boundaries.

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16Bovril owned V.R.D. at this stage. Goldsborough Mort had not had an interest in the station since 1900. See Introduction, Ch.5.
to ever be recovered. But like his following contemporary manager "Dicky" Townshend, Ronan had no time at all for J. Campbell, who for one thing made it too hot. About this time the station ran about forty thousand head of cattle "officially", but apparently there was also anything up to that number running wild and unyardable.¹⁷

The writer has not been able to find out much about the relations between the Aborigines and whites during the early settlement of V.R.D., with the exception of matters in connection with the early white officer led "native police", as already related. But we are in debt to author Tom Ronan who in his excellent book Deep of the Sky, tells the true story of the somewhat garbled account that one picked up out that way a few years following, ref. the blacks' attacks on his father, manager Jim Ronan and party. Apparently the blacks were out to get Jim Ronan, resenting his initiating a fresh campaign making it more difficult for them to spear and stampede the cattle. It appears manager Ronan rode up to Battle Creek, on ahead of a station boy accompanying him ('dodger Jim Campbell had previously battled with the blacks whilst occupying country out that way) some forty miles or so north-easterly from V.R.D. homestead. Advancing mounted into the stream and as he dipped from the saddle for a quartpot of water, two shovel-nosed spears thrown from an ambush of cane grass on the high bank behind him narrowly missed, the first grazing his back, and had he not bent down at the psychological moment reaching for the water, must have been speared. The second one went right through his mount (a mare) just behind the saddle (poor thing! Of course she would have had to be destroyed). The mare performed immediately and unexpectedly, and her rider was hurled

¹⁷See Introduction, Ch.5, p.71. The "certain lady author" would be Ernestine Hill.
sidewise into the water. Whilst Jim Ronan was struggling to release his mauser pistol which was strapped to the saddle, the black boy Jimmy rode up and emptied his repeating rifle into the most likely places of the ambush cover. Tracking disclosed there were only two sets of footprints, but as the mauser ammunition was wet and they'd only one rifle and one horse between them, Jim decided against a pursuit. He assumed the two blacks had been in the ambush waiting to spear cattle as they came in to drink, but could not resist the opportunity under the circumstances, to attack him. Had Jimmy the blackboy not caught up almost immediately with his boss, the latter could quite easily have been killed.

On another occasion manager Ronan was returning from the Depot accompanied by three station employees: two "boys" Jumbo and Jimmy, and a white named Dutchy Benning. Coming through Jasper Gorge late in the day and reaching a portion of same most dangerous for any potential attack by blacks, they found the high cliff swarming with a large mob of them. It was a tricky situation, Manager Tom Ronan's son continues in his Deep of the Sky. Had the spears or even a bombardment of boulders been projected at the horsemen they would have had very little chance. Prestige, however, dictated that they must keep going, and when very close Jim Ronan made the sign of peace, practically what any white man would instinctively do under similar circumstances: a movement of the arm and hand as if in ordinary handshake (with some tribes the hand would be turned upwards). At the same time, and in their dialect, he greeted them, "Good day countrymen!" and same was acknowledged in kind, the echoes in the gorge repeating it several times.

18 "Light of the Sky" in original.
The party kept moving unmolested until a couple of miles free of the gorge, and knowing their wild blackfellows well enough, selected a suitable camp and prepared for the worst. No fires of course, not even a pipe lit. And Jumbo and Jimmy unrolled their swags closer to the white man than usual. Mosquito nets were rigged (presumably as decoys). Toward early morning the two boys, on the alert for danger, heard mopokes calling to each other, and knew instinctively it wasn't the call of those birds, but the myalls signalling to one another whilst surrounding the camp, preparatory to the usual attack at piccaninny daylight. The boys informed Dutchy Benning, but for some reason nobody but Dutchy will ever know (as author Tom Ronan puts it), manager Ronan was not informed. "Perhaps Dutchy just didn't like him," Tom Ronan laconically continues. Dutchy and the two boys took up a prearranged strategical position some fifty yards or so from the camp, a konkaberry scrub topped low rise, that was known ever afterwards as "Spion Kop" (contemporary nomenclature no doubt, Boer War time!). The "garrison" waited with cocked rifles.

Showers of spears fell around the camp at "sparrow chirp" and Jim Ronan was severely wounded in the leg by a barbed spear. The rifles routed the myalls, but as there were no screams it was assumed there were no casualties. How tough those pioneers had to be! Benny, a very strong man, "forced" the spear through Jim Ronan's wound until the barbs were clear, cut it off with an axe and withdrew the haft. The gaping wound was bathed with condy's crystals, packed with Epsom salts and topped off with a dressing of "sterilised" mud (the latter a good old Aboriginal cure), and finally bound with bandages torn from a clean calico tuckerbag. Twelve spears penetrated J. Ronan's net (where he was supposed to be sleeping), and six through Dutchy's.

Eventually a young policeman recently arrived from the South was
dispatched from Timber Creek, and "leading" some mounted men from the Big Run (he insisted on taking charge, though apparently he was the type that would be bushed in a small horse paddock). Finally, through the young policeman's taking official charge, the myalls escaped from the planned ambush, but just in time. All the pursuers found was the body of a girl baby buried in the live fire ashes, but this often enough happened at least in most tribes, the victim being more often than not a female infant. The yarn went that it was too much for the young trooper, who called the chase off and had his resignation from the force already written out before reaching Timber Creek.

Manager Ronan had a Jack Frayne form an out-camp at "Meantajinie" (Aboriginal of course, meaning where wild dogs pass) and as usual with so many Aboriginal names in due time slurred to Montaginnie: the camp some sixty miles south-easterly of the head station. It appears that previously the blacks just about enjoyed unmolested the mass slaughter of stock out that way, manager Ronan once having counted a round thousand carcasses on one occasion (year approximately 1901).¹⁹

Like its contemporaries, the Big Run has had its share of pioneering characters, but the most colourful and popular was Bob Watson, alias the "Gulf Hero", second manager of V.R.D. and many were the tales told down through the years of his reckless daredevilry, including horsemanship, fighting savage myalls, sharks and crocodiles in their own element, etc.. He received his nickname whilst amongst the early cattle stations of the gulf, where he was noted for going out alone against dangerous

¹⁹Information in this and the preceding seven paragraphs has been gleaned from Tom Ronan, Deep of the Sky, An Essay in Ancestor Worship, (Cassell, London, 1962), Chs.21–23. The current spelling of the outstation formed by Frayne is "Montejinni".
and troublesome myalls, and returning in a few days or weeks with grizzly evidence of the hunt, actually on one occasion with a sack full of heads. Or so it was "told": probably a gross exaggeration. He was eventually drowned near Katherine township, or many folk thought he was taken by a crocodile whilst swimming the flooded Katherine River under foolishly bizarre circumstances. The body was never found, and even so far south, odd crocs were known to be trapped thereabouts during the dry. It was assumed he fell a victim to one of the monsters.

V.R.D. history is linked up with Mrs Aeneas Gunn's "Never Never" story. The authoress' mailman hero Harry Peckham, well known as "the Fizzer" (always on the go and hustling), was drowned under tragic circumstances during April 1911, some twelve miles from the homestead. The manager's wife Mrs R. [Katherine] Townshend was seriously ill, and amongst the Fizzer's mail from the station was an S.O.S. for the Darwin doctor. On reaching Campbell Creek crossing, the river was found to be in dangerous flood, so the Fizzer sent his young black boy back to the station to enquire per letter, whether there was anything in the mail necessitating urgent delivery. Otherwise he would camp for a day or two and give the river a chance to go down. The answer was that Mrs Townshend was very badly in need of medical aid. (The poor woman died before help arrived.)

The Fizzer with his boy at once tackled the river. There was trouble with the packhorses about halfway over, they became over frightened and attempted to turn back. In endeavouring to head them in the right direction, Fizzer was caught in a strong current and swept from his horse, swept away and drowned. The brave Aboriginal youth lived to tell

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20 See Introduction, Ch.5, p. 91.
the story. As the Fizzer was swept away he called out, "Save the mail, save the mail." The boy eventually got the mail across and spent some time walking up and down the bank looking and calling for the Fizzer, in vain. He hobbled the horses out, reswam the river and reached the station with the tragic news. An all-night search went on up and down the river banks, the blacks playing their part, continually swimming the treacherous waters, and it was the blacks who the following morning found the remains of both the horse and rider.

The Fizzer was buried at Campbell's Crossing, and his memory and grave were much revered. Suitable bronze and stonework were brought from Adelaide, being carried per packhorse mail over a thousand miles from the Oodnadatta rail terminus in South Australia, to the Victoria River. Some thirty years after the drowning, the Fizzer's remains were moved to the Pioneers' Cemetery on the Stuart Highway. And what became of the brave Aboriginal youth? One wonders! It would be consoling to think he also rested alongside the Fizzer, on the Stuart Highway. He deserved to.\footnote{Lavender has consulted Hill, \textit{The Territory}, pp.233-34.}
And so Young Bill and Harry Jones arrived at Victoria River Downs, the biggest cattle station in the world. So far so good! They could hardly believe their luck, everything had gone their way. The station was a cluster of (for the most part) corrugated iron structures, and on the north bank of the Wickham, a tributary of the Big River, the Victoria. (Incidentally, later on the mates realised that people from the Kimberleys and Western Australia generally, nearly always referred to V.R.D. as the "Wickham"). And of course there was the usual blacks' camp some hundreds of yards down the river.

The Mates remarked it was time they looked up their reference letter given them by "Rowly" Edkins of Bimbah station, Longreach, and addressed directly to manager Dicky Townshend. But, "Where the hell was the letter?" Each mate accused the other of last handling same. However, a thorough search (or several) failed to produce it, and the waylaid [?mislaid] few written lines somehow became very important. Neither mate "budged" an inch, and the unpleasantness faded out on a sullen note. Jonsey's eyes had flashed dangerously and Bill was obstinate (his enemies would say "pig-headed on principle").

Manager Townshend was absent in Wyndham "on business", and of course everybody knew what it was to do with (knew more about it than "Dicky" himself!): "the sale of the Big Run to Vestey Bros."). The bookkeeper "Bob" (the station boys addressed him as Mr Reed) was in charge for the meantime. Most of the hands were out on the run busy with the cow and

22 There was a James Reed on the V.R.D. books at this time. See A.N.U. Archives of Business and Labour - 87/2/1, V.R.D. Journal, Jan. 1909-Sept. 1918.
calf etc. muster, as usual started as soon after the wet as practicable. Bob knew (and so of course did all hands) that two young fellows from the South were to arrive with Bert Drew and the stores. The blacks had smoked and yabbled the news along the river in advance. The Mates were welcomed and made much of, being amongst the first visitors from "the outside" following the easing off of the wet. Bob Reed, a West Australian, seemed particularly pleased with the new arrivals, and was always good for a yarn: had them housed in the "whites' hut". At present besides the bookkeeper, there was only Joe the blacksmith come saddle repairer etc. at the head station, and there was a reliable civilised enough boy, "Old Smiler", for the stock work and rouseabouting. The cook was a Chinese called "Sol". The blacks' camp comprised of elderly people, younger women and children of all ages, all the able-bodied men being away on the muster. Bob explained there was generally an average of about nine white men on the station, "about one for every million in far away Belgium, although that nation did not cover an area as large as V.R.D."

Now the mates had the news that they had been hearing along the track confirmed, that the big fencing project had been indefinitely postponed, thrown into confusion as it were, by the protracted negotiations of the sale of the Big Run to overseas Vestey Bros.. Harry Dempsey back in Darwin was supposed to have received news of this state of affairs long ere the new arrivals from the South arrived at V.R.D.. Something went wrong somewhere along the line of communications, and same could easily happen in a land of such undeveloped means of contact. "Should have smoked it through by the niggers," remarked Joe the blacksmith, "they'der delivered the goods." However, the Lads weren't a bit concerned over this turn of events, and anyway, they hadn't come to the Territory for fencing. Any sort of work would do until a chance of cattle droving showed up.
"Yes", Bob was sure the mates would get a start of some sort on the Big Run, but not amongst the stock as the latter desired, there were too many boys on the place who were excellent at that game. But there was a job of yard-building to be done well out to the south-west of the run, not so far from the Wave Hill boundary. Bob produced the plans, and also told a tale that went with them. Apparently some years previously, a yard-builder named Price took on the job and did a certain amount of work on it. "You'll see the rotting posts lying about in the bush down there," remarked Bob. "The place is known as Price's Folly. Incidentally, you could find a couple of skeletons too," added Bob. "What happened?" queried the now thoroughly intrigued mates. It appeared Price had visited a "gum tree spree" near the Pigeon Hole (home manufactured spirits) and finished up with the near horrors.

A "gum tree spree" was the term given a drinking party clandestinely arranged amongst the station hands etc., and generally held in the open country well clear of the station homesteads. Sometimes "bush made" spirits was the only drink available, but at other times all or at least some genuine alcoholic beverages would be procured. All hands (other than the bosses and their "silvertail" staffs) were welcome and were expected to bring whatever grog they could, but if same were unobtainable they were welcome nevertheless. These sprees sometimes lasted many days for some unfortunates, and there was often much senseless fighting and brawling. When there was nothing but water left to drink, the more hardened boozers, sick, sore and sorry, disbanded. Occasionally an odd one or two would "go bush" with the "horrors", and if not found in time, suffered an awful death.

Yes, Price had finished up the gum tree spree in the near horrors, slung the job in, and cleared off back to Western Australia. It was whispered he'd been a bit too tough on the blacks (re their women of
course) and they were out to get him. It was suspected that he already sensed the "bone" had been pointed against him, or would be at any time. A dangerously embarrassing position for a lone white man away in the extremely lonely bush, if surrounded (even from a distance only)\(^\text{23}\) by semi-civilised and wild blacks, bound by their tribal laws since the Dreamtime, to exact an eye for a eye, etc.. And very nasty things seemed to be hinted at in reference to Price. As time passed he couldn't even trust his own civilised(?) boys, who were not so sophisticated that they could altogether be free of the will of the old men of their tribes. Eventually the lads learnt that Price was suspected of having killed two Aborigines: a gin and her man, who suddenly "went missing". It was surmised he preferred not to be the father of the gin's expected child, and as for her man, he just knew "too much". The bodies were never found, and it was assumed amongst the contemporaries that Price had made a good job of burning them and thoroughly scattering the ashes. Otherwise the blacks would undoubtedly have found the remains. They did find scorched earth and rock surface, but absolutely no ashes at all. It looked as if the murderer, if there was one, had made a good job of it.

The mates knew they were perfectly competent to build the yards and soon convinced Bob of the fact. Bob was told all about the lost reference letter, and of course believed it off hand. "You coves will be OK with the boss, and anyhow the letter will probably turn up in the meantime," he remarked. It was agreed the lads take the plans along with them and have a look at the job (as a matter of fact they felt they had already started). Wages were mentioned at five pounds ten shillings per week, "and find your own tucker". This was a somewhat disappointing

\(^{23}\)The word "of" is here deleted.
state of affairs as regards wages. The lads expected they would be much higher than in Queensland.

Incidentally, in the following few years wages and conditions rose enormously, with the advent of the boom in consequence of the new meatworks (they were to cost millions of pounds) and there were other subsidiary undertakings. Workers, rough and ready fellows for the most part from the southern states, accompanied by urgers and red raggers, union bosses and organisers etc., that squeezed everything possible out of the Territory till the boom burst with the arrival of the worldwide depression in the late twenties, and the holiday of extravagant wages for little work done was over. The newcomers all cleared off south again, most of them to a few years on the dole.

The lads found the arrangement of "find your own tucker" from a weekly wage was a general enough practice out that way, as men camped away from a station homestead generally supported or part supported about half a tribe of blacks, say a buck and his gin (selected for their cleanliness, far as possible) to attend to any washing, or even cooking etc., and anything up to a dozen or so of their uncles and aunties, infirm relatives, piccaninnies etc., and generally some women including grass widows who caused much mischief and worse at times.

Bob explained the lads could take the job on contract if they liked, and this arrangement they thought would suit them very well. However, nothing could be drawn up definitely until the manager's return, but Bob gave the assurance that everything he himself OK'd would be confirmed "higher up". The mates here added to the horses and gear they had picked up at the Depot, toward a complete packhorse turnout. All plant, tucker etc. (the latter temporarily a little light) and also their own gear, was stacked on a large light dray and a start made for the job.
(The ports with suits and other good clothes had been left at the late patronised pub in Darwin, the Club, until sent for or picked up.) A "respectable" elderly boy and his gin (horse boy and slavey) went along with the party, the lads knowing their relatives and friends would turn up in due course. There were eight horses in the turnout. It was a fine day, and the cavalcade set out in high spirits.

Pigeon Hole outstation was "about fifty miles up the river" and the lads' destination was some thirty miles westerly from there. The Folly was apparently in what was known as the Mount Sanford country, and on Gordon Creek. The next three days the party travelled south through beautiful rolling downs country, reminiscent of the central Queensland Mitchell grass downs. High and low hills were generally in sight, sometimes close in, but mostly away on the distant horizon. The line of the river on their left was always definable by the growth of coolabahs along the banks. After leaving the head station horse paddock, there were of course no fences. The lads were enjoying the trip. Some day they reckoned (and meant it at the moment) they would come back and select a lump of this country. The Big Run must eventually be cut up but there was no talk of it those days.

The Pigeon Hole was just another glorified boundary rider's hut, and except for an elderly half-caste, "Sam", was deserted. Like the head station, all available hands were camped out on the muster. Calling here made the trip the long way round, but some important plant had to be picked up. The trip out had been pleasant enough, except for some intense heat, plus flies, sand and otherwise, also mosquitos. The Pigeon Hole was an immense reach of the river: fresh water. And of course there was a blacks' camp handy enough to the outstation: no different from any other camp of the kind, except there were some "artists" amongst them, good at painting their own particular designs
and symbols on bark, using red, yellow and black mineral mixtures. They seemed anxious to barter some of their work with the new arrivals from the South, but at that time the latter were not interested. They learnt later that the artistic work of this particular group of Aborigines was considered rather unique, verified by local contemporary gossip. "A couple of 'ante-pology' blokes" from the South who once visited them and "bartoed up" (bought up) a lot of their work, explaining to the local whites it was some of the best Aboriginal artistry of its kind they had ever experienced.  

The mates realised that some of the tribes were rapidly disintegrating, and becoming more and more less under the spell of the old tribal laws, taboos etc., especially the younger people, much to the disgust and regret of the Old Men of the tribes. The tribes (including sub-tribes, or "clans", "groups" or "herds") around the stations and settlements had intermingled more or less freely as the law of the tribe became less compelling. It was difficult for a stranger to pick out one tribesman from another, and all Aborigines around V.R.D. and Wave Hill were referred to in the vernacular as the "Muddies". However, there were still plenty of myalls back in the hills from the open grazing country, cattle spearing was still rife, and if station people (black or

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24 Anthropologist Norman B. Tindale compiled a "Map Showing the Distribution of the Aboriginal Tribes of Australia" (compiled approximately 1940). This map indicates at least half a dozen tribes along the Victoria River, including the Naliwuru approximately between the Depot and northern boundary of V.R.D., the Ngarinman, stretched well out on both sides of the river between Jasper Gorge and the V.R.D. homestead, and the Mudbara [Mutpura on Tindale's later map] straddling the river in the same way between V.R.D. and Wave Hill homestead. Well to the south around the source of the Victoria, are the Manu to the south-west of Wave Hill, and the Bingongena, away to the south-east. These last two tribes would be occupying semi-desert and straight out desert country, but occasionally under special trading privileges etc., small groups travelled north well into V.R.D. country.
white) became careless and off guard as they sometimes did (familiarity breeds contempt) when it was very necessary to be well armed and on guard, they were running a grave risk of attack and tragic death. Right along the "line" since arriving in the Territory, the lads had been warned never to cause the blacks to think you were not always armed and ready for attack.

The popular caution was proffered the mates again and again, to the effect that one could carry a gun (generally a revolver) through the bush (that was away from the settlements and most of the homesteads) and you may never use it; but should the occasion arise that it was necessary, and probably it would be sooner or later, "you'll want it pretty bad, and quick." Meaning of course, that if the blacks knew people were always armed and ready for them they were loath to attack, but to go amongst them apparently unarmed was tantamount to inviting trouble, and therefore foolhardy. Nobody, reckoned the mates, seemed at all interested in the blacks, except from the point of view of getting as much out of them as possible, for as little as possible in return. The new arrivals from the South, less prejudiced than the "old hands", could not but agree amongst themselves (and to admit same openly would render them unpopular) that the "niggers" were getting a very poor "spin" from the whites. The old hands could not understand any white man being interested for other than what could materially be got out of them. They could understand the interest of anthropologists and archaeologists (they were a class apart, educated intellectuals, but considered more or less "a bit mad") but for anybody other than those people evincing that sort of interest, well, they were just "not understood". Indeed, such a one was even inclined to be ridiculed and even ostracised. (Anyway, that is how the mates interpreted that phase ref. blacks and whites.)
[Having] arrived at the Folly, camp was made at a waterhole adjacent to Gordon Creek, named after the nephews of the original "patrician" like pioneer "Bluey" Buchanan, who with his nephews, were the first white settlers to ride the Wave Hill and V.R.D. country, in the late eighteen seventies. A start was made cutting the posts and rails, the timber resembling that of central Queensland. The lads very soon began to feel the intense isolation, and deliberately put in a long and generally hard working day. The blacks' company was welcome, and it was beginning to be understood why so many white men went completely "combo" (living with the "Abos" as one of them). Within a few days the mates' initial Abo. couple "Ada" and "Richard", were joined by the several hangers-on expected. The old couple were warned in effect not to make it too hot, but it was found the numbers could be regulated by the amount of rations issued to the "old people" (incidentally, about the most humane sounding nickname that was used in ref. to the blacks) as when the ration issue was light they had to hunt for practically all their own tucker, and so cleared out when the game etc. became scarce.

Once in a week or so there was a rare harvest for them. By arrangement with the station people it was understood that employees on the station in a capacity similar to the lads' agreement, were allowed to kill their own beef, free of cost if the beast was a mature unbranded "scrubber". Of course this part of the verbal agreement was sometimes broken and officially "winked" at, cleanskin beef was sometimes difficult to locate, depending mostly on what part of the run men were located in. However, plenty of cleanskins came down from the hills and ridges adjacent to the lads' job, and the boys with eyes like hawks

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25See Gordon Buchanan, Packhorse and Waterhole, With the First Overlanders to the Kimberleys, (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1933), passim.
could pick them out without much trouble. The station brand was a bull's head, changed years previously from the letters GIO (there was still odd cattle "with the vote" and carrying the GIO brand, running wild on V.R.D.: the boys pointed odd ones out) because the latter was so easily manipulated by the poddy dodgers into a different brand altogether, or so it was said. When a beast was shot, the news flew around somehow, not by smoke if the whites could prevent same, as 'twould bring too many myalls in from the hills which lay to the south-west. But there was generally a good roll up. Harry Jones had been a Master Butcher by trade back in Ireland, and would order the boys (they were good at cutting up a beast) which cuts to bring into the camp, the best of course. And didn't the old people just clean up the balance. Nothing was rejected but the dung in the entrails, but the latter itself was considered excellent tucker, and they couldn't resist the temptation as a delicacy, to eat titbits of it raw. Occasionally armed myalls hung round in the background, but the lads armed at least with revolvers (belted and holstered of course) ordered them well back, but later when the whites returned to camp, the myall visitors' kinsmen were allowed to welcome them in to the feast. The boys knew better than not to deliver the goods as ordered, the best cuts to the whites' camp. Whilst all this was going on, at least Ada and Richard watched by the camp; but they always got their share of the white's food after generally making a fair job of the camp cooking.

Without being directed where to build their bough mia-mia, they were well enough up in these matters of prevailing etiquette to do so at a reasonable distance from the whites' camp, but well in sight of same as it was part of their job to guard it in the lads' absence. They (the "domestic duties" staff) were actually camped on the next downstream waterhole, and their visitors on arrival were told through Richard to
camp not closer than the far end of that water. The prevailing south-easterly winds were also in the right direction for this set-up. Incidentally, all this should have suited the blacks also, who insisted, if they were allowed or invited to speak on the subject, that an objectionable odour exuded from the white man. Personally, the mates reckoned this a deliberate exaggeration: the blacks loved to get a "crack" back at the whites, when allowed the privilege.

Richard turned out to be a decent enough old fellow, mellowed with age and experience. He could hark back to the days when he and old Ada were young members of the local Mutpura tribe, and were hunted and shot at by the white invaders, the "cuddybahs" (occasionally excitedly dropping pidgin for his own dialect). Much cattle spearing was freely admitted to. Eventually they and others were enticed in to help with the station work. When Richard realised the lads were treating the Old People decently, he showed his appreciation in a broad grin, and as time passed, was induced to tell more and more of the customs and beliefs of his own people, and, the lads thought, without any undue exaggeration. Generally when the Aborigines were encouraged in this respect they let themselves go altogether, and told the whites anything they thought would please them most. Richard let it be known his people knew all about the mates' visit to the corroboree way down at Blunder Bay, and their being given the nicknames of Didgeridoo and Bullroarer to Bill and Harry respectively: "Didge" and "B'roar" for short. Incidentally, the mates were several times re-introduced to these weird instruments whilst visiting the blacks' camp, the former getting a kick out of it, and the latter generally much amusement. The blacks once again enjoyed Young Bill's mouth organ playing, and Harry's loud bass-baritone singing. As previously remarked the blacks are great mimics. Most of them are humorous and dearly love a bit of fun. This also goes for the
children, who often get over cheeky, if permitted, necessitating much checking from their own people, to say nothing about the whites. The Mates were "sung" in simple corroboree, and it was wonderful how they were mimicked in every little characteristic and movement. They, the Abos, were very pleased with a mouth organ when discarded as old and done, but didn't get on too well with same, seemed to have difficulty with their thick lips. And their women were always there, and with their men's and the Old People's blessing, the lads felt sure, were endeavouring by their own customs of flirting and daring gesture, to encourage the white men on to adventure. Odd ones were attractive and fascinating enough to a point, and considering it was a land of intense isolation as regards white contacts, and no white women at all, the temptation wasn't that easy to resist.

Old Richard told of the bygone tragedy that happened at the Pigeon Hole. Two white men, "Dutchy" and Jack Edwards, were building yards at the Pigeon Hole, and went out with the dray for a load of rails, leaving in the camp a sick bunk-ridden white man, a gin and a black boy. The latter for some reason or other "ran amuck" (went berserk) and shot dead three people. The Lads later learnt that the maniac "had been done out of his woman" and it "played on his mind". They thought this explanation likely enough, but apparently nothing official came out ref. same. The first victim was the sick man, killed in his bunk. The gin ran off into the bush, but was followed and fatally shot down. The killer then waited in ambush along the track for the returning dray. On opening fire on the two white men, Dutchy, although mounted and carrying a revolver, galloped off for the Pigeon Hole and help, leaving his mate Jack Edwards riding on the load of rails, unarmed (seems to have been particularly shabby behaviour on Dutchy's part). The madman fired again and again at Edwards, who appears to have kept his head, dodging around
the dray, and throwing stones at his assailant to disconcert him. The plan was almost successful, the maniac's last cartridge killing poor Edwards. Then the gallant(?) Duthy galloped up with help from the Pigeon Hole. The frenzied boy took to the bush, abandoning the empty rifle. He was eventually arrested, and hung in Darwin. The victims were of course buried at the Pigeon Hole where the Mates viewed the typically neglected graves.

Richard's descriptions in pidgin of the Dreamtime monster heroes were difficult to make sense of, but the lads realised that if they remained out in these parts long enough to learn sufficient of the tribes' dialects (and the difficulty was some dialects varied more or less, although some particular words were common to most of them), could the dialects be sufficiently mastered, a wonderful story of the Dreamtime creation, religion and mysticism of these people could be compiled. Every natural object of any significance whatever had a legend of its genesis: a peculiar shaped stone, or several such, an isolated clump of trees, or scrub.

A river was the track of the absolutely enormous "Rainbow Serpent" (a universal myth it seemed to be). It appears that back in the Dreaming Time, this Rainbow Serpent god came out of the sea to the north, onto the land, making the depression that became the Victoria River. The myth hero then swung off to the east, making and leaving the Armstrong River behind him (a tributary of the Victoria). The god next tackled the Murengi Track (spelt as pronounced), but how come no river was left behind hereabouts seems to be lacking an explanation, although he may have been too busy shedding the hairs of his head on reaching the Murranji Waterhole (the story relates) to find time for the extra wriggling required for making a river. However, the hairs of the Serpent's head grew into the vast bulwaddie and lancewood scrubs that
goodness knows how many centuries later stopped the white explorer John McDouall Stuart's westward march in the early eighteen sixties. (Stuart endeavoured several times unsuccessfully, to penetrate the dense waterless scrubs to the west of Newcastle Waters, and so reach the Victoria River.) Well, the Rainbow Serpent kept on eastwards across what is today called the Barkly Tablelands, poising on the way to wriggle out a big hole in the plain which countless years later with the advent of the whiteman, became known as Anthony's Lagoon. Eventually reaching far off country (the Queensland of today), the Serpent then expired somewhere hereabouts, of some reason or other (cause forgotten by writer, perhaps it just had to expire thereabouts having probably reached the boundary of the apparently large and numerous tribe who occupied the country traversed by the Serpent, and so the original legend compilers of the tribe just had to wind up their story) and became the range of rugged hills, ages later called ---- (this name also forgotten!). But there are hundreds of legends great and small, along the fantastic lines of the one related above.

Richard also related a long story about two mighty Dreamtime Heroes called the Lightning Brothers. It appeared that away to the north and north-west of V.R.D. homestead amongst rugged hills and gorges, was all that remained of those two gods of the Dreaming Time, symbolised by some double rock formation on a hillside, and various cave paintings depicting the adventures and very wonderful deeds of those once mighty Heroes. Of course the Mates were interested enough, and basking in the extreme optimism of youth, that 'twas only necessary to express a wish for the future and same would automatically eventuate, vowed that some day when the chance came, they would spend some time visiting the locality and examining the relics of these local Aboriginals' long past. The Lads could not foresee the advent of the Great War, and how it would
alt the plans of millions of people, including their minutely insignificant proportion.

In at the Pigeon Hole for rations the Lads contacted Jack Hayes of Wave Hill station, who invited the former along to a couple of days' "gum tree booze" to come off over the Wave way. The Lads were glad of the chance of a break and some fresh company. It was a sixty mile ride to the site of the booze meeting, and two of the boys accompanied them as guides (the whole camp would have been delighted to go along, having friends and relations at the station camp). The Mates rode of course, and the boys trotted along untiring and happy. The party was held on Blackgin Creek, a few miles from the Wave Hill homestead. It was to be a quick and lively gathering, just a couple of days' pause in the mustering prior to shifting camp to a new area. In the event there were some half dozen white men and about the same number of half-castes, of whom it was known of the latter they could take their "likker" without going mad altogether. It was pretty well sundown when the lads and their accompanying boys reached the gathering on Blackgin Creek. The former had had enough for one day, but the "boys", although on foot, didn't seem so tired. They were given a good nip of spirits and then went on to join the Old People at the homestead camp. The Mates were made welcome enough. About the first question asked of them was had they brought their mouth organs along, and of course they had. Incidentally, they were not able to take along any "likker" but apparently (being new arrivals they thought) they were not expected to, and offering money in lieu of same would be taken as a bit of an insult.

Socially the "turnout" was a great success. Two clear days "jollo" seemed to be the time limit decided on, and all hands were expected to honour this arrangement. The mustering could not be delayed this time of the year, but the bosses expected and winked at a short break or two
during the big mustering, considering it good for all hands; kept them from getting stale and disgruntled. Time enough later in the year for longer lasting gum tree sprees, and of course there was the big break near the end of the dry, September-October, for the famous Depot races, when people turned up from hundreds of miles around. The Lads didn't drink much, they just hadn't formed the habit, which they considered in their case just a happy accident (or curse!) of birth. It seemed some men took to booze naturally, starting young. Others, although experiencing much environment that could encourage the habit, just didn't fall for same. However, the Mates let themselves go for a couple of days, and had "just enough".

Of the company the whites were a mixed lot, and from "all over the world". A couple of native-born Australians were straight out illiterate, could neither read or write (albeit at their game, they could hold their own or excel against any stockmen in the world, and that of course included rough-riding and horsemanship). The most odd guest was an Afghan camel driver, always addressed and referred to as "Allee" (spelt as pronounced). The Mates had never met just such a character, not having experienced the arid and semi-desert areas where the camel teams thrived. They wondered if all the camel men in Australia were Afghans; they were always referred to as such. Camels and their use thrived in many countries of the world. How come Afghans only were interested in that phase of Australian pioneering? The only explanation the company could offer was that Afghans had brought the first camels to Australia (in connection with the Burke and Wills expedition of the eighteen sixties) and held the market against all other competition.

Allee was enjoying the party as much as anyone. It seemed he had brought most of the grog out from Wyndham; had been trapped down there
during the wet, and was now on his way back to the "Centre" via Wave Hill, Tanami and Alice Springs hoping to pick up loading on the way, various minerals for the railhead at Oodnadatta, South Australia, where he could get plenty of loading for back into the Centre again. What a life, the lads thought, but they reckoned one such trip would be an interesting experience, and they might some day catch up with same.

Wave Hill station was much discussed. The old hands as usual sensing the interest of the new arrivals to the North, had a lot to tell about the Wave. They didn't agree about everything amongst themselves ref. same. Time and retelling of supposed facts often very much distort the true story, which checked up through reliable channels half a century later nevertheless straightens out into a very interesting chronicle.

It appears that back in eighteen eighty, the renowned overlanding bushman and pioneer Nathaniel "Bluey" Buchanan, successfully negotiated some pastoral leases on the upper Victoria River. It appears he "put in" for Wave Hill and an area that later became Victoria River Downs, after he had ridden over and examined the country. He was beaten for the latter by speculators who never moved out of the cities, and tied up the areas immediately they were gazetted, just on "spec." Bluey (he was seldom referred to by any other name) then made the best of the inferior country that apparently the speculators didn't want.

About 1883 he, Bluey, started stocking the Wave with cattle from Dalgonally station, Queensland. He was accompanied by his two nephews (his wife's people) the Gordons, and the renowned "Greenhide" Sam Croker (he that was eventually shot dead by a half-caste on Auvergne station). On reaching journey's end the overlanders camped on a large waterhole of the upper Victoria, and it became the head station of the run. It was named Wave Hill on account of the rising country across the river to the
east, which could be likened in appearance to a huge wave advancing to engulf the campers.

Wave Hill was for a few years an extremely lonely and isolated place (and by contemporary comparisons of today, 1964, eighty-four years later, it is still very isolated). The run comprised some seven thousand square miles. As a matter of fact there was also tens of thousands of square miles of uninhabited semi-desert country stretching away southward, from south-east to south-westerly, some of it that could have been made use of in suitable seasons. And at time of writing this manuscript, 1964, over three quarters of a century after the Wave being taken up, the position ref. all the open country to the southwards is the same today. None of it has ever been taken up. So it's highly likely it wasn't worth much to the original pioneers to the north of it. Originally the nearest habitation to the Wave was Delamere station, two hundred miles off north-easterly, but in every other direction the country stretched away devoid of settlement for upwards of over five hundred miles.

"Greenhide Sam", other than Bluey Buchanan, was the first manager of the Wave. Other great bushmen on the station in the "earlies", and of whom the Mates often listened to redeeming accounts of same, were Tom Cahill, Jim Cullen and others. It was Tom's brother Paddy Cahill (one of three overlanding brothers) who later took up "Owenpelli" (long before the Mission of that name) on the East Alligator River in wildest Arnhem Land. Paddy became famous as one of the first buffalo shooting "Kings". He was out there during the lads' "tour" of the North. These early adventurous overlanding pioneers were mostly dead or scattered in old age at the time of the lads' sojourn up North, but they were so often discussed by the old hands that followed them, that even reading of any of them today, Old Bill feels for them as old friends.
Along with most newly taken up stations, the Wave had its share of trouble with cattle spearing blacks, once they had tasted beef. And as usual it wasn't what they ate, but the numbers they wantonly speared, and amidst much cruelty. The whites, always armed, caught up with them now and again, and although there is very little known "officially" about these skirmishes, the Lads often enjoyed the old hands discussing quite openly the actual shooting, wounding and killing of some of these downright difficult pests, the cattle spearers. But what else could those pioneers have done under the circumstances? Of course they could have cleared out and left the country to the original rightful occupiers, as many settlers did, temporarily, but that sort of justice was not understood or appreciated out that way fifty to a hundred years ago when it was considered the White Man had a moral right to occupy the blacks' homeland, and were entitled to shoot them down when they forcefully remonstrated. However, one can understand the clandestine arrangement amongst the settlers: no "official" admissions at all about any shootings or exploiting of the blacks.

Previous to the cattle spearing for beef and sport becoming more and more popular with the blacks, there had not been much trouble with them. The very many miles of open plain and downs country, on the whole sparsely timbered, did not lend itself to much stealthy attack or ambush, and the original inhabitants themselves were not very numerous; further more clearing out or hunted by the new arrivals to the timbered and rugged hills and ranges away toward the horizons east and west of the river (although it was only seven miles westward from the homestead to steep and rugged mountains). Then from these fastnesses they sallied out to the hunt, retiring to the hills again with their beef after a successful kill. Apparently numbers of cattle walked and staggered about with half a dozen or more spears in them, many of them dying a
terrible death of same. Often enough spearheads (stone and flint) were found embedded in the beef killed for the station, some wounds years old and overgrown with flesh and hide. This state of affairs ref. cattle spearing and the whites' insistent protective patrols was necessary for some decades before it eased off, as the local Muddies were more and more induced to "come in" and camp adjacent to the station and help with the work; and the others further out realised it paid better to considerably quieten down their spearing exploits. But there was still a comparative minimum of it going on when the Lads were out there in 1914.

The Mates were convinced the old method of getting rid of a "cheeky nigger" was still quietly and carefully practised, a little of it, when odd natives became over conceited and arrogant (cheeky), to avoid them setting a bad example to more cooperative blacks (moreover they could be dangerously homocidal when in the "cheeky" mood). If on the simple side, the pest would be given a "paper yabber" (which was carried in a split stick) to be delivered through "friendly" country to some far off white folk, say Delamere station three hundred miles off. The letter would be a request to the manager to send the boy off on another out-of-the-way journey with a similar letter, requesting that the cheeky one be kept travelling. Often the latter never returning to the original starting point.

Another and more drastic practice in urgent cases was to induce the offending nigger to accompany a party of whites to a suitable place well out on the run where he was clandestinely "accidentally" shot dead. The whites of course never "talked" officially of these matters. The blacks eventually knew all about it, would probably find remains in due course, or the scorched evidence of a big fire (definitely no ashes as civilisation and the police caught up with the years) and guess the
rest. They never spoke of it to the hated "per-leece" (police). The victim's relatives might plan for "an eye for an eye" and harbour the resentment even for years, but that chance had to be taken by the perpetrators. No doubt they (the victim's relatives) were "looked after" too, in an appropriate way, perhaps hunted to far off country if thought necessary.

During the first few months at the Wave a mob of Muddies were surprised whilst ransacking the camp by the whites returning in the early afternoon. Firearms were brought into play and the Muddies moved off smartly, Greenhide Sam shooting one whilst swimming the river (not now known whether any fatal casualties occurred). However, the blacks were able to make off with valuable camping gear in the shape of buckets and billies etc. It appears camp cooking utensils in particular were very popular with the blacks, and they undertook great risks to steal same. The whites found this gear had to be guarded carefully as, if all disappeared, replacements of same were many hundreds of miles off. On another occasion whilst camping out on the run one bright moonlight night, there was a great hullooooloo [sic] from the dogs. The campers thought they discerned shadowy shapes disappearing in the distance, and next morning bare footprints were found close up to the fire and billycans etc. were missing. But other than happenings of the nature of the abovementioned raids, apparently there was not overmuch trouble in the vicinity of the home camp. It seems there were no casualties amongst the whites in their early skirmishes with the Muddies. Greenhide Sam was very keen in following the blacks' forays up with retaliatory measures. They were shot up as often as possible on such occasions (with what results will never be known) and as many of their weapons etc. as possible destroyed. The Muddies were out to "get" Sam, but apparently he was always too alert and knowledgeable of their habits,
they never caught up with him. His death by a civilised half-caste years later had no connection with the Wave Hill Muddies.

Bluey Buchanan was a different type of man and always got on extraordinarily well with the blacks. The following instance will serve as an example of his knowledge of their psychology. One late afternoon he was fishing in a waterhole of the Gregory (Queensland) River, the sinking sun mirroring in the water the scene behind him. For once Bluey was unarmed, but he was then a comparatively young man, lacking the experience of later years. Suddenly he was startlingly surprised to see mirrored in the water, a painted myall on the bank behind him with woomera-fitted spear poised for throwing. With a mighty effort, Bluey controlled himself from panicking and continued (he hoped) calmly fishing and making out he was not aware of the enemy behind him. He had guessed, and rightly, that the blackfellow was well nigh mesmerised at the white man's style of fishing and was watching intensely. He thought quickly as to what he should do, but there was nothing practical he could do, so he kept on fishing and watching very keenly his potential murderer.

Presently, and it seemed just in time, he hauled in a fair sized fish, the black betraying great excitement the meanwhile, and lowering his spear still further. Bluey unhooked the fish (he began to sense the danger was now easing) and turning round, smiled (or tried to) at the blackman, and threw the fish to him with an inviting gesture. The recipient couldn't believe his eyes and dropped his spear to secure the gift, grinning broadly the meanwhile. They were now friends, and the white man set the nigger to look for bait. But Bluey knew it had been a very close shave. Even had he been armed, he could have been mortally speared before seeing the enemy mirrored in the water. But "a miss is as good as a mile," as Young Bill and his cobbers used to say during the
fighting of the First World War, and one never knew, fortunately, how often one was very close to death, and neither did Bluey Buchanan and his contemporaries.  

Allee induced one of the half-castes, well "bottled" and "nigger-twisted" up (not too much of the former) as bribes to induce some of his Old People at the Wave Hill blacks' camp, to put on a sham fight at his (Allee's) camel camp. This diversion was primarily in honour of Young Bill and Jonsey, who had never seen a camel team, or an Aboriginal sham fight. Some half dozen of the more sober of the spree party (all more or less happily drunk nevertheless) rode off the following morning as Allee's guests (as it were). Significantly, on the latter's advice, most of the party wore revolvers (inconspicuous as possible, no provocativeness) as 'twas thought the blacks might under the circumstances get over excited, what with a little grog and sham fighting to be done.

The camel camp was about a mile or so down the river from the Wave homestead. Allee had an intelligent half-caste, "Peter", as his right-hand man with the camels (about twenty-five of them), and he was allowed to wear a "gun" (revolver) when necessary. He was wearing it on the party's arrival. Allee explained to the Mates that he encouraged his man to wear a gun as a warning to "cheeky niggers", but generally it was not loaded. However, the mates knew enough of the North to feel it was well and truly loaded just then, for the same reason that their own were. Peter was boss of an understaff, a small mob of Muddies including their women. The Muddies were on a tucker handout, "bacca", and an odd

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26 Information in the preceding paragraphs concerning Wave Hill and Nat Buchanan is derived at least in part from Buchanan, Packhorse and Waterhole.
trinket now and again. The tucker handout was not such a "cop" for them, as Allee being a Mohammedan, abstained from meat unless killed by himself. As he was in entirely cattle country and it was too uneconomical for him to kill his own meat, he went without. So there was no meat in the blacks' handout rations. They hunted most of their own food, and helped with the camels and loading. They would desert when reaching their tribal boundary further south, and their place taken by occupants of the current tribal area, and so on. They lounged about out of aroma nuisance range (the whites were particular about this), scantily clad or naked. The camels were hobbled and belled (some of them) further down the river, where their aroma and near presence would not upset visiting horses.

 Volunteers for the sham fight (plenty of them, women included) had already arrived and were camped down the river a bit, busy putting on their war paint. The lads induced Allee to sell them some nigger twist and a few bottles of grog, and same was gradually distributed (albeit the latter sparingly and discreetly) amongst the Old People to keep them happy and enthusiastic. Allee sent his boys out to bring a couple of the quietest camels in to the lee side of the camp where some twenty pack-saddles and a couple of lighter riding ones were laid out in a neat enough row. The camels were a bull and a cow in calf (such a pair mate well and are generally quiet enough). Allee was talkatively "under the weather" and happy in his own element as he explained and showed off his skill as a camel teamster. The queer looking beasts (not so queer to people handling them daily for years) were "hooshted" down (made to lay down) alongside their saddles, and the latter adjusted to the beasts. Allee explained how the loading was adjusted etc., and then came one of the highlights of the party. The cow was fitted out for riding, and the Lads were invited (the first "volunteers") to climb into the "single"
saddle and have a ride. They had some idea of what they were up against, having heard how difficult camels could be to the inexperienced, but they felt they would be considered "squibs" altogether if they refused to supply the fun that was expected of them. Anyway (as previously mentioned), the Mates were happily half shot, along with the rest of the company, and game for anything. They amused the gathering right from the jump by pretending to be much more scared than they really were. They tossed up for first ride, not with a coin incidentally, nobody ever carried such useless things out there, but a small flat stone was picked up and spat on, and up it went: "Wet or dry?"

Poor Bill was the victim. He climbed into the saddle whilst the camel was still sitting on the ground, and the company (including all the blacks) stood round in expectancy of a good laugh. Allee hooshted the camel up onto its legs. A camel rises from the ground like the domestic milk cow, hind legs first, but the movement is quicker and more violent and potentially precipitant for the mounting inexperienced rider. A person used to camel riding, after mounting to the saddle and hooshting the beast up, leans back to just the right degree whilst the animal's rump rises suddenly behind him, and then well forward to counter the movement of the rising forequarters. But poor Bill wasn't ready for all this, and fell forward and out of the saddle at the first unexpected upheaval from behind: roars of hearty laughter, especially from the Abos, who also leapt high into the air in their mirth. Bill was speedily helped to his feet feeling a bit shaken, but forcing a grin and pretending to enjoy it. Jonsey's turn next, and he came off at the second (forward) convulsion: more hysterical joy, the victim laughing loudest of any.

A couple more of the party minus experience were practically made to
mount, with varying success. Allee finally gave a good exposition of how to mount and ride a camel, leaning backwards and forward with the beast's movement and stride. The Lads eventually got the idea, without falling off. Whilst this fun was in progress, the bull showed his disgust by groaning deeply, and protruding a large enough balloon-shaped mass of flesh from his mouth (apparently a habit and phenomenon of bull camels).

One significant phase of camel management is the way the bridle and reins operate, from a wooden plug inserted through the tender part of the beast's nose. It takes very little pressure on the reins to control the camel. The bulls carry up to ten hundredweight, and the cows about half that weight. Apparently camels were used extensively from the eighteen sixties until the advent of the motor truck after the 1914-18 War. In the North they were seldom seen (comparatively), most of the carrying being done by coastal steamers and small river craft, thence to the stations per horse and donkey teams.

After much feasting and drinking, and the Abos had just enough of the latter (one or two too much), came the sham fight. The blacks looked hideous in their white, red and yellow war paint. Several drew up facing each other at thirty to forty paces, and all were armed with a shield, three blunt-nosed spears and a woomera (for throwing spears with great force). When all were ready the game started. There was no special umpire, but the seniors of the tribe controlled the "fight" from the sidelines. It was a magnificent spectacle, demonstrating how exceedingly quick the un- and semi-civilised Aborigines' eyesight is. The spears are thrown from the woomera with great speed and force, and very straight, but very seldom a hit is scored on any part of the contestants, their eyesight is just too quick; and the rounded shields (some thirty-six by eighteen inches) is moved just as quickly into a
position so that the spear is glanced harmlessly off. For further supplies of the latter, the spent ones are picked up warily, giving an opponent as little chance as possible for a "sitting duck" spear throw. Each side in turn seemed to work themselves up by chanting, dancing and stamping, which would culminate in a spontaneous advance of a few paces amidst much vigorous spear throwing. The opportunity for these tactics seemed to occur when one side was caught temporarily short of spears. The fight went on for about an hour and hundreds of spears must have been hurled, but other than a graze or two, nobody was hurt. The Abo head man called the fight off and it was declared a draw.

Then a singles contest was put on. Word had gone around that it was a grudge fight, over a woman of course. These two got to it in dead earnest, and close up. They fought determinedly and savagely (had it been in other environment amongst myalls the spear heads would have been well pointed and barbed). After a few minutes one boy was proving the stronger and gradually beat his opponent back. The latter received a bad graze whilst out of spears and reaching for one on the ground. There were angry roars and exclamations from the weaker fighter's friends, and quick as anything three or four fully armed incensed "savages" (for that's what they degenerated to in a split second) lined themselves up alongside the latter, and hurled successive spears at short range. Their "target" was quickly beaten back, defending himself effectively nevertheless, but unable to launch a spear. For a few moments things looked bad, and the Lads understood why they were expected to wear their guns. They instinctively felt relieved they were. The victorious "gladiator's" friends were about to line up with their fighter, shouting protest to the tribal group head man (who just then was accompanied by the miserably physiqued "King", but he didn't seem to have any influence at all although he was wearing the government
inscribed brass plate). Allee, Jack Hayes and other whites, either tapping their holsters or actually drawing their revolvers (the mates quickly following their example) shouted to the Abo. leaders to stop the fight immediately or they would use their firearms. Luckily the local leaders kept their heads and deliberately (and gamely enough the Lads thought) strode between the contestants and firmly demanded peace and quietness. The danger was over almost as speedily as it started, but the whites at least knew the blacks (aided by what little grog they had consumed) had instantly almost worked themselves up into a state where anything in the way of fighting and slaughter could easily have happened: it had happened often enough before. The whites now ragged the Abos good naturedly, heartily congratulating all the fighters, and the blacks, childlike, shortly recovered their better nature and were laughing and joking amongst themselves once more.

Now [some young bucks]²⁷ began throwing their big and heavy fighting and hunting boomerangs along a bare, hard flat a short way off. Then a couple of "comeback" boomerangs (traded from hundreds of miles down south; comebacks were never manufactured up north) flashed and zigzagged about before returning to the throwers, and considering the latter were out of their element ref. the comebacks they did well, the old hands reckoned, to occasionally catch same on return. The non-comeback throwing was very good and fascinating to watch, but as an account of this Aboriginal accomplishment has already been related, we shall leave it at that.

The blacks were very anxious that the whites remain for their camp fire corroboree. The Mates were keen on remaining overnight, and Allee

²⁷"a young buck" in original.
was agreeable enough, so they put it to Jack Hayes as to how the spree company would take it if they stayed on with Allee for the night, seeing that they, the Lads, were invited guests of the former. Jack assured them he would fix it, he'd send the necessary explanation back, that the recent arrivals to the North were very keen to see their camel mounting antics re-enacted by the blacks in corroboree. The corroboree that night was somewhat similar to what the Lads had previously seen by varying numbers on several occasions, but this one was carried out a little more realistically and many of the participants were grotesquely painted.

There was a good roll-up of women, kids and old men to supply the music, beating kylie sticks, boomerangs etc. and slapping their thighs in rhythm, and a couple of good songmen to lead them, and of course there were also the didgeridoos and bullroarers. It was a magnificent starry night and the Mates were virtually enchanted with the environment, and what with the corroboree and wild looking company including the three lone whitemen wearing their belted and holstered revolvers, and the weird chanting and wild "music" following the lead of the songmen, the latter sometimes stealing the show by harmonising solo or together only, for short interludes. And as the barbaric music and chant-singing rose and fell in volume and length of time, so did the dancers follow suit, now leaping high in the air and stamping impressively, a little later gradually easing off in speed and vigour as the song-man took over the singing alone and lowered his voice, occasionally very considerably. A few minutes later the dance, song and music would reach full pitch again. When it was considered the dancers were due for a bit of a spell, the head songman singing alone, raised the tempo of voice and dance to a virtual crescendo, finishing up on a high and peculiarly falsetto note, and there was a break in the dancing for a while.
The dance had portrayed hunting 'roos, emus, snakes and dingoes etc., bringing home the proceeds of the hunt, preparing and cooking the food, and finally wolfing same. In each phase (the dance was explained in sequence by old-timer Jack Hayes) the dance had been an interpretation of the Stone Age man's joy of being alive and living.

The Lads distributed a little "twist" tobacco, and just a little nip apiece for the songmen, the head men, the insignificant King and finally the sub-tribe's rain-making man (who after the second nip braggingly promised to make all the rain in the world any time during the dry). This procedure followed each phase of the corroboree (and it was on the Mates), supervised carefully by Allee and Jack Hayes, who prudently controlled themselves to "happy drunk" as the maximum. Allee, the Lads learnt, being a Mohammedan, was not supposed to take drink but he had been in Australia a good many years and was far from any of his own countrymen just then. As Jack Hayes said, "All men are human, even Mohammedans." As usual there were some, under the circs, fine and good enough looking women (the young of course, the older ones being anything from "haggish" to ugly and a bit repulsive, poor creatures!). The former were at no pains to let the strangers know they were game enough for flirting, but the Mates were shy and disinclined. Jack and Allee were mildly disgusted with them (the Lads), and jocularly reckoned they were silly to miss out. "You'll fall later," they declared, "we all have."

Next phase of the corroboree was a fighting dance, and by the painted warriors only. Each man carried a "war" spear or boomerang and a shield. The participants in this interpretation tracked their enemy, caught up with them, fought and of course defeated them, pursued them, slaying many the meanwhile, and then marched home in triumph carrying bundles of captured weapons; and apparently they received a great
welcoming reception from their Old People. This last phase was taken up by all the onlookers, who clapped and slapped and yelled and yack-aired to no end.

Then came the free-for-all: the Lads falling off the camels. The latter were ringed round the camp fire, boys on their hands and knees with well-humped backs. When "B'roarer" and "Didgee" mounted, as the "camels" rose the riders fell off in a frightfully clumsy manner, "Bill" as the hind legs straightened, and "Harry Jones" meeting his waterloo as his mount finished rising on its fore legs. Pandemonium reigned supreme amidst deafening roars, shrieks and laughter. All eyes were turned on "B'roarer" and "Didgee" (the Lads having been hailed by their Aborigines' nickname on first arriving at Allee's camp) but they knew what was coming, and this time thoroughly enjoyed the joke on themselves. The blacks got Harry's laughing roar off to the letter, and apparently Bill's reaction to being "spilled" was a whimsical looking grin. No doubt the boys were great mimics. They even had Long Jonsey represented by tallish boys, and the nuggety Bill by boys of a similar build. Strange (or was it?), nobody carried cameras those times, nor kept diaries for that matter; a pity!

The Old People had plenty of meat on hand, a timely hand-out from the station, and a feast had been prepared whilst the corroboree was going on, and now there was a great "tuck in", plenty for everybody. The whites did the same round Allee's camp fire. The corroboree went on till piccaninny daylight. It was fascinating to lay back in (or on) one's blankets (the mosquitos had disappeared) looking up at the stars and listening in to the blacks' hullabaloo, or sitting up watching their grotesque forms weaving round and round their huge fire (the weather was getting cooler at night). For the most part they seemed to be chanting and singing the same few lines over and over again, but the variation of
volume etc. seemed to prevent it becoming too monotonous, and too much of it would, thought the Mates.

Of course the Lads were made to play their mouth organs and sing alternately, and as usual it went over well. Under pressure they just couldn't refuse to lend their organs to these hospitable "children", but they consoled themselves with the fact that they could be given a good boiling later. In the event they were passed on to the Abos' piccaninnies for keeps, which pleased the Old People greatly.

Returning to the spree company the following morning, from a bit of a rise, the Mates had a final peep at Wave Hill homestead. The famous station was shortly to change hands from the Buchanans to the new overseas cattle empire octopus, Vestey Bros. Incidentally, during the next wet season, a boomer, the homestead was practically swept away in the huge floods. It was then moved seven miles easterly onto open plain and downs (a bleak, dreary looking environment) and that is where it is today. A police station has been established some years back, close to the site of the old homestead.
Bronco Yards on Gordon Creek, Victoria River Downs.

Wave Hill Homestead, c. 1920.
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Chapter 20

NORTHERN TERRITORY STOCKMEN: AMONGST THE WORLD'S FINEST

The gum tree spree on Blackgin Creek was breaking up and the Mates took the Mount Sanford track for Price's Folly and home. The Abo guides had not shown up, but the Lads were not worried, they knew they were good enough bushmen to find their way through the trackless and somewhat rangey country once they turned off northward from the Mount Sanford track. Mount Sanford was an out-camp, some twenty miles westerly from Price's Folly. It was occasionally used during mustering.

The Lads were suffering a hangover, although they had consumed little grog in comparison to the rest of the party. They didn't bother taking along a couple of nips for a "pick-me-up", not being experienced boozers. As the day wore on they felt weary and despondent and not much was said until the unfortunate quarrel over (for the second time in a few weeks) who was to blame for having lost the reference letter to their credit from Rowly Edkins (of Bimbah station Queensland) to Dicky Townshend of Victoria River Downs. It happened whilst the Mates were waiting for the quart pots to boil during a break in the long, lonely ride. Suddenly the wild Irishman in Harry flared up to near frenzy (it had happened before, but very rarely) but Bill laid off, he hadn't quite

1The words "as to" are here deleted.
lost his "block", and he didn't want to be attacked by a mad Irishman (worked up to the strength of several men) in the bush many miles from anywhere, and over three hundred miles from a doctor and hospital. One word from Bill would have started it and anything could have happened. But Bill kept quiet and took all the invective his temporarily insane mate hurled at him. After a few seconds the wild Hibernian made an exclamation of utter disgust (presumably at his Mate not accepting the implied challenge to fight it out) and he shut up like a clam. The tea and brownie was partaken of in a dead silence. Then for the first time Bill's eyes rested on the two loaded revolvers lying right under the Mates' noses, where they had unbuckled and dropped them on dismounting. Well! (it occurred to Bill), one thing to their credit, neither party gave any sort of thought at all during the heat of the quarrel re the guns. Bill instinctively included his Mate, and has the same conviction fifty years after the event. This assumption pleased Bill. There was of course nothing in the quarrel, just the reaction of the hangover and the lonely environment. However, nothing was said, and the Lads prepared to mount and continue the journey.

Suddenly Bill received a resounding whack on the back and there was Harry grinning and apologising for being such "a silly big mug", and congratulating Young Bill for not losing his "block". Harry now threw an arm round his Mate's shoulder and hugged him, same being reciprocated by Bill, at least in sentiment. Bill had a good idea this procedure was coming from Harry, but he didn't expect it so soon. However they agreed they were a pair of silly "b-------" to get hot over such an insignificant matter, and vowed they would never mention the "bloody" letter again. Nevertheless, the Mates soon lapsed into silence again, and rode many miles without remarking on anything at all. The hangover was still on.
Arriving at camp in the late afternoon, the Mates were tired and weary. They had ridden harder than usual. Animals (reflected Bill) generally have a harder time when their "masters" are in a moody disposition. Something about Richard's manner led the Lads to surmise he was pleased enough about something. He smirked as if he might have good news for them other than that the "Big Boss" (manager Dicky Townshend) had called and was disappointed to find the Mates away. He was accompanied by one "Billy" Jones (a not too popular "upstart overseer") originally from South Australia, who had been on the run some years. He later committed suicide whilst in the horrors, at Matt Wilson's Depot store, and is buried there. Incidentally (and sad to relate), poor Matt himself was eventually buried alongside Billy, having met self-inflicted death in a somewhat similar manner. The grog gave out suddenly after a long spree one wet season at the Depot, shortly after the Second World War, and Matt wound up a bad case of the horrors (delirium tremens) and used a firearm for the last time.²

The Big Boss had pegged out some of the yards, and left a note for the contractors that they were not to start any erecting of same before discussing the matter with him, and suggested they contact him at the homestead if he didn't call before they were ready to start building. Richard said the Big Boss also had a look over the timber they had cut, and he seemed "much proper pleased".

Richard's surprise for the Lads was unfurled during the next hour. Ada set the Mates' tea to cook, and they prepared for a sponge bath. The soap was missing, and Richard explained (without being asked) that same had been borrowed by the "girls" down at the Abos' camp. "What

²See note, p.279.
girls?" demanded the Mates. "You'll see, soap he come back pretty soon," was the answer. However, the cook's washing-up soap was borrowed for the meanwhile. The evening meal was finished, the sun had vanished and it was getting dark. The Lads were still in a taciturn mood, just one of those "fed up with everything" breaks that cropped up occasionally amongst outcasts from civilisation in that lonely, isolated country. Came an unmistakable challenging tittering and bright laughter of young Aboriginal females from an adjacent scrub. "What for all about that one?" Richard was asked, and after the strangers were contacted in an exchange or two in the Muddy dialect, it was smirkingly explained that the challenging callers were the two new girls who had borrowed the soap (significantly, it turned out they wore no clothes at all) and wished to return same. Richard was instructed by the now intrigued whites to bring the soap along. More words in the Muddy tongue, and the Mates were informed they were invited to come and get it, the girls giggling and laughing the meanwhile, and it occurred to the Lads it was pleasant enough to listen to. More significantly, and unknowingly perhaps, it suggested a diversion and bright company (of a sort) from the prevailing despondency. And so the girls were contacted willingly enough.

It was a great success right form the beginning, and Harry was straight away pleased with the tall girl, and Bill with the more stocky one. They could not have been considered repulsive in appearance, looks and manner by any standards (under the circumstances). They had magnificent eyes and teeth and attractive short, jet black frizzy hair, could have been sixteen or seventeen (the northern Aborigines mature early) but looked older. Pleasant pidgin conversation made it clear they had long unpronouncable names, one referring to some bird, the other to a certain tree blossom. Much amusement was derived for some
time abbreviating the names to "Noonah" (the blocky girl of the flower name) and "Jareena" (the tall girl of the tree blossoms). Encouraged by the camp blacks, and anticipating a successful contact with the Mates, they had been knowing enough to have had a thorough "bogey" (swim) and soaping wash. Their bodies fairly glowed, and the aroma of same was not at all unpleasant. Both girls' breath smelt of tobacco, and they admitted they occasionally had a few puffs from the elderly old people's pipes. They came from an adjoining tribe to the south-west, called the "Jininnie" in the vernacular (officially the Njinin\(^3\)), whose tribal grounds stretched away over the West Australian border to the head waters of the Ord River and they were on a friendly intertribal walkabout visiting some of the Muddies.

The moon and stars (they looked fascinating that gorgeous night) registered early morning when the party broke up. Harry enquired, "Well how'd yer go Bill?" and the answer was "all the way." "Me too," Harry remarked, "but roll on tomorrow night." Each knew they had both gone a step further toward becoming a regular died in the blood [sic] Territorian, and they were happy enough about it to boot. Their short spell of depression was over and forgotten. The Lads learnt more of the girls in the next few days. The tall Jareena had a couple of the smaller toes missing where she had been bitten when a child by a fresh water alligator, and the toes and adjoining flesh had eventually rotted away. These "Johnston Crocodiles" (a popular vernacular name, they were first identified in the Queensland Johnston River) inhabit the fresh water river sources and waterholes above salt-water contamination, up to several hundred miles from the sea coast. They grow to some six or eight feet long and are harmless to man except when cornered. Jareena

\(^3\)There is no equivalent on Tindale's later map.
had trodden heavily on one of these reptiles (in shallow water), with the result as explained.

However, the victim was not at all handicapped by the slight disfigurement, and her slight and well-formed figure and pleasant appearance more than made up for the defect. The Mates were a little taken aback a couple of days later, to surprise the girls smoking large smelly old pipes, their own. There were no "trade" pipes on hand amongst the Lads' stores just then, but a fresh supply was obtained soon as possible. It didn't seem quite so unseemly to see the girls using brand new smaller and cleaner pipes. The smokers were also taught and encouraged to smoke daintily, and to expectorate quietly and tactfully, and only when necessary. The Mates even smoked a little themselves, by way of company.

The girls were a bit over persistent in continually hanging on to their latest catch, couldn't realise there was a time for play and fooling, and a time for work. They would have moved in the Lads' shadow all the time (in fact would have temporarily, at least, moved into the Mates' camp if permitted) and only too often had to be determinedly hunted off; and at that they would hang about for hours in the not too far off distance. They upset the yard-builders' working day, and there was not now the time put in on the job, as previously. However, everybody seemed happier for their presence. More liberal handouts and presents were the order of the day, and of course the blacks shared everything up amongst everybody. There was also more beef slaughtered, the boys regularly reminding the tucker suppliers whenever a cleanskin grazed too close to the camp. As a matter of fact it was known the boys made it their business to foot muster small mobs including at least one cleanskin from miles out, in toward the camp, and the mates more often than not didn't have the heart to disappoint them.
The Lads realised in due course that they had treated these Price's Folly Abos most generously, and had shown much sincere interest in their customs and way of living; had not bullied them unnecessarily. They were not quite used to this treatment from the whites. No wonder they "howled and tore their hair" when the Mates pulled out for pastures new. The blacks here did most of their cooking by throwing the proceeds of their hunting, 'roos, emus, snakes and all kinds of birds, lizards etc. onto the fire, entrails and all, and devouring same in a state between a slight singeing to well roasted. Occasionally they would go to the trouble of beautifully baking their meat, especially beef, in "bush" ovens: holes in the ground filled with hot stones and ashes. The Lads would often be presented with a delicate portion of this cooking, and generally found it very good eating. They also gathered various grass and shrub seeds, ground them to flour between large and small flat stones carried about for the purpose, and baked same in or on the ashes; but it was a poor second to wheaten flour, and not nearly so palatable. The Mates sampled everything at the camp, even a cut from an alligator brought by the visiting Jininnie Abos (half myalls) from the south-west. The camp cooks had apparently gone to some pains in thoroughly baking same, and it looked like a beautiful piece of pork. However, it fairly stank, and tasted ... like alligator. The recipients of same pretended to enjoy a couple of mouthfuls in the presence of the gift bearers, and quietly buried the balance when unobserved. It would have been a shame they thought, to disappoint the painstaking chefs.

The Lads were getting used to the sight of the blacks getting around naked, both sexes. But of course when they were in any sort of employment around a white man's camp, more so a station homestead, they were compelled to keep themselves clean and free of high smelling and worse goanna oils (caked on with ashes) for protection against sandflies.
and many other pests. They were expected to wear shirt and trousers, the women generally wearing some sort of old gown. All the males had been circumcised (per the stone knife and of course no pain-killer of any description, and no whingeing, but the youths were wonderful stoics and trained all their lives to endure pain): a minor ordeal of the Manhood Initiation Bora. Some of them had also undergone subincision, and it was somewhat of a novelty to observe them in the stance of urinating, which was in the same manner as a woman. The blacks took this custom in their stride, and there was not the mock modesty as practised by the whites in reference to some of nature's functions. The uncivilised blacks immediately buried all excreta. But the reason was not on account of health, but that it would tend to prevent their enemies procuring same, and condemning them to death by dry baking it and contaminating the careless enemy (who failed to bury same) by dusting his food with the vile potion. And believe it or not, this wisdom was handed down from the Dreaming. It was equivalent to having the bone pointed against one, the victim frightening himself to death. No doubt the Old Men had invented the idea way back in the Dreaming to scare the Old People into cleanliness.

Apparently subincision was practised when thought necessary by the old men of the tribe, to counter over population during semi-famines caused by prolonged droughts. This custom of course contrasted with the belief that copulation had nothing to do with childbirth. The writer thinks the blacks were fond of romancing ref. unborn children sheltering in certain trees and clamouring to be claimed by willing would-be mothers who welcomed a child into their bodies etc., etc.. But the Old Men (leaders and jealous guardians of the tribes' customs practised since the Dreamtime) really knew that copulation was the deciding influence.

One day the Mates observed a blind gin being led about by an old
woman, both clutching opposite ends of a long, light stick. The observers knew what it was all about, a venereal disease patient on a walkabout from a bush hideout camp of sick people (some very much so). They were hiding from the police, whose duty it was to round them up and dispatch them (in chains if necessary) to the V.D. hospital adjacent to Darwin. The old people were straight away warned by the Mates not to allow any of the hiding sick ones near their camp at all, under pain of all the old people being hunted right away. The blacks would rather rot and die in the bush, those days, than give themselves up for treatment. But that was fifty and over years back. Aboriginals are handled much more humanely today (1964), and no doubt they would be only too happy to cooperate with the police in such a matter.

The young children played around a lot, similar games (under the circs) to those of white children. There was the tree climbing game in which the contestants were required to climb several selected trees to a specified height and one after the other, and the first home to base won. Then there was the berry game, similar to the white kids' marbles; the tobogganing game, sliding down a steep bank on a sheet of bark into a waterhole; etc. and so on. Most children daily underwent more or less tuition from their elders in tracking, hunting and nature studies, and the boys in the use of the blacks' weapons.

The Mates learnt the blacks considered that the bearing of children had nothing at all to do with the sex act. Children were spirited into the woman's body by certain tree foliage child fairies, and if a woman was not desirous of being in child they must avoid all natural objects such as a hollow log or small cave, and be careful not to step over any hollow object as the child spirits seeking out mothers dwelt in such places. The same women must avoid whirlwinds by all means: they were swarming with the child spirits. On the other hand a woman desiring a
child threw herself in the way of all this child distributing "machinery".

A badly mentally deranged but harmless youth in the group was treated with consideration and kindness (and same went for all their mentally sick people), but all hands, and especially the children who followed him around (or vice versa) a great deal, were fond of making much fun of the victim's shortcomings, and same would occasion raucous mirth and laughter. But nobody durst harm the victim in any way, for this was the law of the tribe. One of the poor lad's antics was chasing whirlwinds and rainbows. The Lads could never ascertain just what his idea was. The old people would just let him chase them and he would generally be back in due course, but sometimes they would have to go after him (track him down) and bring him back or he would be out all night, as he had been on rare occasions, to be ready for a flying start after his quarry at piccaninny daylight. Well! It certanly takes all sorts to make a world, even amongst mental cases of any colour.

When these people could not obtain white man's tobacco (it was really manufactured for the blacks, imported from somewhere in the Orient), they chewed their own equivalent, "pituri", which was done up in a rough plug and at least looked somewhat like the inferior white man's product. It came to the North (per trading parties) from the Centre, down around Lake Amadeus and the Simpson Desert, where the insignificant looking pituri plant grew. The leaves and twigs of the plant are pounded to powder and mixed in with other herbs including ash burnt from certain of the latter. It is then chewed, plugged and baked. The drug is manufactured in varying strength, and the varying grades can render a person calm and mildly contented and happy, to "crying" or raving drunk. Apparently the blacks down in the Pituri Country occasionally have a tribal spree on the stronger product, and there is "hell to play" [sic]
for a day or so, but eventually they all collapse "standing" in a dead
stupor and sleep anywhere (wherever they happen to drop off) for very
many hours. The Abos' tobacco is generally carried about behind the ear
or knotted in the hair. Sampling the milder type (an Aborigine will
often make a friendly gesture and offer a bite of his pituri plug), the
lads found it objectionable enough (but admittedly they were non-smokers
or "chewers"). Like tobacco and alcohol of course, one had to acquire
the taste to appreciate the habit.

The Lads had come across a couple of the blacks' graves, a rough
platform in a low, forked tree. The corpse was covered with bark and
leaves. One looked to have been there a long time, the other smelt to
high heaven. In due course the bones are taken down and lodged in a
small cave in the ranges. The Muddies adhered to the pretty well
universal belief, that nobody dies from natural causes; some enemy has
to bone or sing them to death. When a person dies, they look around for
some poor devil to pick on, and they have various mystic ways of finding
a culprit, and of course the innocent often pay the penalty, but the
idea seems to be that someone has to pay. There is then a "legalised"
boning, or sudden treacherous spearing. The former death was then
avenged and everybody (except perhaps the victim's relatives) was happy
again. The Mates learnt of occasional cases of bone pointing, and the
lethal power of same was amazing. Directly a victim even thought he was
being boned or "sung", he just "sat down" in fright and starved and
pined to death. Nobody dared help him, it was the law of the tribe.

Quite a lot of interesting matter could be written of the way of life
of these people, but just a few matters that interested the lads at the
time have been mentioned. Most of the tribes were more or less in the
process of breaking down and away from their old customs handed down by
word of mouth from the Dreaming Time. Unfortunately too, at that time
they were a dying race. More and more of the young men were defying the tyranny of the Old Men and the laws of the tribe, and were adopting the white man's ways, protected by their guns from the wrath of the old people. But there were still thousands left in the ranges and scrubs up North, those days.

A few mobs of cattle had already pulled out from the Big River stations, and were on their way to Newcastle Waters on Th'overland via the Murranji track, thence across the Barkly Tableland per Eva Downs, Anthony's Lagoon, Brunette, Alexandria, the Ranken and Rocklands stations and on over the Queensland border (or through the Camooweal Gate), about fifteen miles from the miserable little Queensland township of that name. The prescribed stock-route ran through or adjacent to these places mentioned, and the trip from the Victoria River to the Queensland border was about six hundred and fifty travelling miles. Drover Herb Cuthbert, accompanied by a civilised half-caste local boy called "Offsider", dropped in on the Lads' camp one evening and stayed the night. The Mates were very interested in Herb and put it straight at him: "What about a spot of droving?" Herb was a quick witted and humorous type of fellow with sharp and twinkling eyes, medium build, and wore a goatee beard: easy to get on with. He looked a stockman, and there was nothing flash about him. His answer to the enquiry was pleasantly evasive. He'd "see how things went". Thence onwards the Lads felt they were being sized up. Drover Cuthbert was on his way to a mustering camp down Catfish way on Wave Hill station. It appeared he had business with the Wave people ref. a large mob he was about to lift from that station. Noting the young fellows' interest, he suddenly invited them to accompany him. This meant of course they could try

4"Marangie" in original. All subsequent spellings have been changed.
their skill at the mustering camp, and although the Mates were not too confident airing their ability alongside expert Northern Territory stockmen, to decline the invitation, they thought, may enhance [sic] their prospect of an early start on a droving trip. Anyway they were keen on the trip, and they expected to see some good horsemanship and stock work. They were not disappointed.

Observing Richard's woman Ada at the cooking, Herb enquired of the Lads whether they had ever done any camp cooking, and although he asked the question casually enough, the Lads thought he expected and waited for an answer. "Well, yair," and it was explained in effect that both Lads had done plenty of camp cooking. In fact Bill made it known that he had once cooked for cane-cutters for a couple of weeks pending the arrival of a professional chef, and Harry, not to be beaten, told the same sort of tale: a surprise to Bill, but Harry was shrewd and surmised there may be something "doing" here. Camp cooking could mean cooking for drovers, a good lead up to a job in the saddle. The boss drover let the Mates talk whilst he listened.

It appeared the mustering camp in the Catfish Country was way down toward the south-west corner of the Wave about sixty to seventy miles off "as the crow flies", and not so far from the Inverway station boundary to the west of it. There would be four days riding there and back, of over two hundred miles. A couple of packhorses were taken along loaded with nap tucker and camp gear, and a couple of spares. The local boy Offsider knew this country well, and Herb called for the shortest route practicable, but "not too much rough going". The Mates were having the time of their lives one way and another, and the next few days were to be no exception. Yard-building was a stodgy job compared to this they reckoned, even if there was no pay attached to the latter. Well but quiet enough mounted on their own hacks, with
stockwhips swinging over the forearm and revolvers slung, and in good company, they felt like the lords of creation. Harry carried the rifle in a greenhide gun bucket. It was a fascinating holiday. Offsider picked the way amongst a maze of mild to rugged hills and ridges, some timbered and scrubbed, others bare and ruggedly rocky; in colour brown to blazing red, depending on how the sun and light caught them. Over creeks and along valleys, then more low ranges, the guide avoiding climbing the high or steep ones, and he seemed to know where the gaps and passes were; not much open country. The timber became less tropical and more and more resembled similar country in Queensland.

There were myalls through this country, and one of the party carried the only rifle that was taken along (the old type .303 military rifle procured from the V.R.D. store) across the pommel of their saddle occasionally, through "ambush" country, "just in case" and "to show the flag". Abos were seen near and far off, and on the skyline, and of course the smokes went up. The Wave Hill camp would know just who was coming, how many, and when. Most of the "niggers" bolted when intercepted, others stood their ground or went out of their way to contact the whites. Offsider knew most of the latter. Of course they all wanted "tabac", and as a friendly gesture a little was distributed; it didn't take much to please the poor devils. A few of the accosters were inclined to be brazen and cheeky. Herb wouldn't stand a bar of this type, and ordered them to hell in no uncertain manner. He could look grim and determined enough when he wanted to.

Herb's Boy deviated a couple of times, went around certain flat country, and also around at least one ridge that looked mild enough to climb. But Herb let him go, explaining aside to the Mates that they probably were sacred "charingga" hiding places or Bora grounds and although semi-civilised, the Boy was still superstitious and under the
spell of the power of the tribal laws; he could not be made to trespass on sacred grounds.

Not so many cattle were noted through this country, and most of them were very wild: "Plenty of cleanskins," Herb declared. Once the remains of a speared beast was passed; the blacks had been hacking the meat off it, but of course bolted before the whites appeared on the scene. And no wonder, it bore the V.R.D. bull's head brand. Another carcass stumbled on smelt to high heaven, and although swollen and torn about by wild dogs etc., the Boy pointed out where the myalls had pulled their spears out, and to one broken off short which they hadn't bothered to remove. It was apparent that the poor beast was one of the many that belatedly got away from the hunters, and badly pincushioned, died a hard death, the ground being much churned by its death throes. The Abos had of course found their kill too late to be any good as tucker, but recovered their spears.

Camped at a lonely creek waterhole that night: Gill's Creek, Herb declared, after conferring with his Boy. It was well over the Wave Hill boundary which boundary Herb had remarked on (acquired through the same news channel) when crossing same about mid-afternoon, but there was nothing of any kind to indicate it was the boundary between two large cattle runs, aggregating some twenty odd thousand square miles. Anyway, Herb thought it prudent to adhere to the current idea in such "nigger country", and when the night's yarning was over and the fire was allowed to burn low (could never tell what hostile eyes were watching, and the blacks could be heard corroboreeing away in the the bush and ranges), some blankets were arranged around the camp to resemble sleeping men, and the whites (and of course the "boy") sneak off a few hundred yards to a preselected suitably camouflaged spot, and camped down for the night. The whites took watch one hour on and two off (the boss drover's
watch coming in handy here) and Herb reckoned the boy would be on the alert most of the night, but particularly around piccaninny daylight, which of course was the most likely period for myall attack. The horses had been hobbled and tethered (unbellled) after dark, and planted in an environment similar to, but a little off the sleeping whites: had been known to give the show away by whinnying and snorting. Of course all firearms were checked before settling down, but the whites sleeping with them.

The Lads noted Herb, as an old-timer, took no chances. It appeared, according to Herb's running and camp fire conversation, that this rugged sandstone ridgy country they were now in was a broad belt running north and south and to the west of V.R.D. and the Wave, and had always been a great hideout for myalls that sallied out onto the open downs to the east, secured their beef, and retired with it back to the hills and ranges. It had been very difficult hunting them down and punishing them. That is, it was impossible to stamp out all cattle spearing, but it could be kept at a minimum. Roving bands of myalls (sometimes called "munjongs") from the north and south still used this "range" to visit (for various purposes) the country at either end, or to sally out on to the big runs mentioned. This belt of rugged country and its inhabitants was also a natural boundary between V.R.D. and Wave Hill on the east, and Waterloo and Inverway stations to the west of it. When necessary to move stock from one side of this "range" to the other, one of the few narrow ravines running east and west was made use of, and was considered a ticklish job, the cliff and gully tops having to be manned against myall ambush.

The mustering camp "down Catfish way" turned out to be a temporary makeshift, spoken of as the Mount Barton camp. Same mount could be spotted over to the westward. The Lads were in luck again, the Wave
Hill crowd having planned a "moonlight" ride for the same night, and although the Mates were not that fresh after their long ride, excitement keyed them up tremendously. A couple of mobs had already been moonlighted and moved into more open country nearer the head station. It turned out some of Herb Cuthbert's mob were to come out of these half wild cattle.

"Buck" Buchanan, the boss, handed out very heavy revolvers amongst his white stockmen, three of them: "Wild" Bill Cowan (head stockman), "Ozzie", and Ted Hales. There were also half a dozen half-castes and full-blooded Abos, including a near white camp cook. The revolvers, the holsters of which were strapped along the wither in front of a knee pad, were for shooting down scrub bulls and any over determined breakaway beast which looked likely to lead the mob back to the safety of the scrub and ridges. Herb informed the Mates he had put a word in for them with the boss (who incidentally, thought the Lads, seemed a quiet, easygoing type of man), who had no objection to them going along (although he knew they were practically new chums at this game), at their own risk of course, but they were to follow the man they were assigned to and do just as he told them and otherwise keep out of the way; and give the experienced mounts they were to ride their "head". "Don't try to 'tell' yer mounts what to do, let them go their own way."

The camp was on a creek waterhole, a strip of almost open plain country stretching for miles between scrubby ridges. The wild cattle came out onto the plains to graze and water, but if in the slightest disturbed, took to the hills and stayed there. The musterers went after them by moonlight, the formers' movements concealed by darkness, but having enough bright moonlight to otherwise manage. A small mob of semi-trained quiet cattle were taken along as decoys.
The party set off along the plain when the near full moon was high enough. They had some three miles to go, the nearer country having been already worked out. Nearing the locality of operations, absolute quietness was observed and the shadows of the lee side of the plain were taken advantage of, with the prevailing south-westerly winds in the hunters' favour. And so the dozen or so coacher cattle were pushed out into the middle of the plain, and the hunters waited in the side shadows.

Presently there was much "mooing" between the coachers and the wild cattle. All animals are curious of strangers, and the wildies soon began investigating the strangers on their preserves. The hunters (Young Bill clinging close to "Ozzie", an easygoing sandgroper (West Australian) whom he was to help, or shadow, throughout the operation) - the hunters were now tensely awaiting their orders to move, the well-trained stockhorses sensing same and getting a little worked up and restless, to say nothing of their riders. The plan had been discussed, and every man knew his proper job. Apparently the only variation from the previous moonlighting was the presence of Herb Cuthbert's party.

By the sounds coming from the coachers and scrubbers (much challenging, snorting and defiant cattle "talk" and locking of horns etc.) the mob was now mixed up sufficiently, and so the boss called "right oh", and led the way at a furious gallop which accelerated when it was realised the wildies were off for the safety of the scrubby hills, taking the coachers with them. The riders were strung out in line behind the boss and Wild Bill, and the mob were eventually headed off amidst much yelling and whip cracking and made to "ring" in the same way that any cattle rush is mastered. A couple of attempts at a break led by a stray overdetermined beast was halted by a few shots from the heavy revolvers and the offending beast being brought down. Young Bill
and Long Jonsey were enjoying the thrill of a lifetime, but even though the horses were old stagers and thoroughly knew this game, and the country had been picked for galloping over in moonlight, there were many pitfalls in the way of fallen trees, stumps gilgal holes etc., that a rider never realised were there till the horse under him took the necessary avoiding action. Bill almost left the saddle several times. His mount "Ned" had to be pulled back a bit for a start, wanting of course to get up with Ozzie's galloping prad, but soon realised he was to keep position behind, and this he did very well, giving his rider the opportunity to crack his whip occasionally, which was very reassuring, same rider feeling he was somewhat doing his bit. It was tremendously exhilarating, and Bill knew his Mate Jonsey was experiencing the same. However, the old hands took these rides in their stride, it was just part of the day's work. At one time Bill following behind Ozzie was caught up in stopping a break led by a light coloured scrub bull, which although puffing and blowing badly kept straight ahead for some scrub not so far off. Whilst his mount kept perfect position on the bull's near side flank Ozzie put several shots into it, shooting as close as possible for the kidneys, before the beast was brought down.

By the time the mob was forced onto the camp some time later, it had pretty well had enough, and did not take overmuch holding. In due course everybody was more or less happy over tea and brownie at the camp fire, especially the Lads, who hadn't had such a thrill since the cattle break back at Boulia, Queensland. This was the life, and they would have gone on talking about it till daybreak, but for the boss reminding all hands it was "only a couple of hours off daylight", and "plenty of work to be done tomorrow" (he forgot to say "today").

During the moonlighting the younger calves had been allowed to drop out, not being able to keep up with the wild gallop anyway, and also too
susceptible to fatal injury. Their mothers were not allowed to break away, but there was not much trouble here, a cow knows instinctively she will eventually find her calf hiding close to where it dropped out of the gallop.

Under other circumstances the cook's breakfast alarm (a kerosene bucket thumped with a waddy) would have sounded at piccaninny daylight, but the boss realised his men would want some sleep (to say nothing about himself), what with a few hours work to be done on the open (yardless) mustering camp. The Mates crawled out of their nap more dead than alive, but they felt they were lucky, not having been called to do a trick round the cattle, which of course had to be held together during the remainder of the night. However, they consoled their consciences with the fact that there was plenty of hands available to hold the small mob, close up one hundred other than the coachers, which was apparently considered a fair moonlight muster.

The Mates found themselves in amiable company and realised the visitors to the camp were appreciated. Of course the Wave crowd had heard all about the new arrivals from the South, and the local Abos knew all about "B'roarer" and "Didgee" and Herb Cuthbert was an old identity. Still, there was even a little snobbery even in this outlandish camp, but the Lads were realising there had to be in any camp, it could only level out at a minimum. The whites congregated together, the bosses Buck and Herb a little apart (they had much to discuss), the half-castes (loosely referred to as such, when the harsh phrase "yeller blokes" was not used, both references included all castes of coloured men other than full bloods); so half-castes grouped a little to one side, and the full bloods quite apart. When necessary each group had their own camp fires. This routine was very elastic at times; it was the custom, and worked smoothly enough.
All hands in the saddle after breakfast, the Lads being pleased to give a hand holding the mob together. The "wet" cows, less a couple of cleanskins to be branded, were now cut out of the mob and started toward their hiding calves. In the meantime fires were got going and the branding irons inserted for heating. This camp site had been picked out with an eye to several suitably bunched trees of the right kind, that could be used for roping the beasts to for "marking" etc., the brand heating fires being handy as practicable, but on the opposite side of the trees to which the mob was to be "worked". The "wet" cows were the first to be roped for attention, including their tails being "banged" (some inches of the "switch" being cut off) so that they could be more easily picked out in future. This method of branding etc. was known as "bronchoing", and could only be done by stockmen of much experience. A beast would be worked into a position (shouldered by the ridden stockhorse onto, or near, the outside of the mob nearest the securing posts (that was the trees) and the rider with a greenhide plaited lasso, the other end of which was secured to a stout surcingle underneath his saddle-flap, would then lasso the beast around the horns or neck, and the well-trained mount would turn toward the selected "securing" tree and haul the back-struggling victim up to same, where it was quickly lassoed again and secured to the tree by a couple of boys on foot, the first lasso being released as quickly as possible by a small but strong disconnecting apparatus within reach of the lassoing rider. The struggling animal was then made to step into a lasso around a fore or hind leg (or both if necessary) and would fall more or less heavily to the ground, and of course the beast must fall on its correct side. It was then immediately sat on by the Boys, the neck and rump being the positions for same. The beast was then ready for branding and earmarking, and "cutting" (castrating in the case of a "mickey" - a young bull). Sometimes it was necessary to saw an ingrowing horn off, or the tops off dangerously long and sharp ones.
Smaller animals were sometimes "bulldogged" from the saddle, but generally "tail thrown". The rider would jump off his mount at the psychological moment and grab the victim's horns whilst in a position just behind same and facing the same way as the beast, and in close to the neck. A twisting pressure is then exerted on the horns, compelling the animal to fall over sidewise and in toward the manoeuvring stockman. The beast hits the ground a little shaken and nonplussed (as when the same occurs in tail throwing from the saddle), and before it can pull itself together two or three men are sitting strategically astride it. Larger beasts are brought down by yet another method known as "tail throwing", which requires much practiced skill from the operator. The stockhorse, which knows its job very well of course, is ranged alongside the galloping beast and the rider leans over and seizes the end of its tail. His mount accelerates the pace, and at the psychological moment when the victim's hind legs are off the ground, the rider gives the tail a vigorous tug, causing the animal to crash sidewise to the ground with considerable force, where it generally lies for a few seconds (if the stockman has done a good job), badly winded and shocked and a little stunned, and during this time the rider vaults smartly to the ground, his mount pulling up immediately. The rider sits astride the beast's neck and prevents it from rising. He is now generally assisted by one or two helpers (especially if the beast is fairly grown) who have been riding closely behind him, and the beast is ready for the knife and irons. A stockman particularly smart at this game can secure (unaided) the off and near side legs around the fetlocks with a surcingle or saddle strap in such a way that the beast is unable to rise.

The Lads were amazed at the clever and skilful horsemanship and stock handling of these Northern Territory stockmen, realising, they considered (and Old Bill reviewing same in retrospect feels sure it was
positively so) that they were witnessing an exposition of horsemanship and stock handling at least as efficient as anything to be seen anywhere in the world. But this was natural enough under the circumstances, horsemen born to the saddle and handling of stock, it's in their blood, having lived amidst the same environment all their pioneering lives. And the horses and cattle were in the same category as regards environment, ranging the unfenced country with a small minimum of association with Homo sapiens, a proportion of them for years at a time.

These stockmen were good at their game, and they knew it. Furthermore, most of them, without being unduly flash, were more or less showing off for the benefit of the two new arrivals from the South, who couldn't help showing their admiration of the Northern Territory stockmen's skill. The "Boys" were all very good, and incidentally doing most of the showing off.

Then the boss, egged on by Herb, invited the Mates to try their hand at tail throwing and securing a couple of youngsters. The latter were willing enough to try, but naturally enough felt a bit nervous and not too confident. However they couldn't refuse the offer, they knew Herb was interested to see what they could do (as a matter of fact they had practised a little of it unofficially and by way of skylarking only). Jonsey's turn first, and as he went in Bill looked round and observed all hands grinning (especially the Boys), expecting some fun. Harry brought his beast down OK on two occasions, but the fall was not quite heavy enough to slow up the animal's recovery, and the rider not quick enough out of the saddle and onto the victim. He nearly pulled it off the second attempt, falling over backwards and looking a little foolish when the beast just beat him in getting its neck off the ground. Jonsey was now warmed up and all on for another go, but the boss tabooed it, explaining later that one could too easily get hurt, and it was a long
way from medical aid, etc.. However, everybody enjoyed it as great fun, laughing uproariously [or raucously] and as usual again, the boys more so. The mates were not surprised to learn later that the Wave blacks had in due course depicted "B'roarer" and "Didgee" in their attempts at tail throwing, in "fun corroboree".

By this time Young Bill was hoping the boss would bar him from trying his skill. But he must have been a fair enough actor, as he was allowed to go right ahead. About the same show resulted as the first trier, but the rider proving a little slower than Harry, the beast didn't get a chance to upset its attacker, and there wasn't quite so much to laugh about (too bad for the Boys, who couldn't help showing their disappointment).

The same evening Jack Hayes with some coloured Boys arrived, and they were to take the mob (now much quieter) less the coachers, to the Catfish holding yards some twenty miles over on the river. The following morning Herb, his Boy and the Mates got an early start on the return journey to the camp at Price's Folly, and boss Buck and his gang had the day to leisurely organise another moonlighting muster.
Chapter 21

COOKING AND HORSE-TAILING FOR A DROVING PLANT

Some two weeks following the Lads' return to the Folly, a note from boss drover Herb Cuthbert arrived per Boy, to the effect that if they were still interested in a droving trip (and the Mates reckoned he would have his tongue in cheek as he wrote it, he knew the recipients of his note were very interested), he would meet them at the Pigeon Hole on date specified ref. giving them a start. Excitement reigned supreme, the Lads were "made", everything was working out fine, especially when the Boy volunteered the information that Boss Herb was already on the road with a "much big feller mob".

There were complications to be ironed out ref. getting away. Morally they were under verbal contract to complete the yards, but by a stroke or two of luck the contract had not been signed. As a matter of fact all the timber for the job had been cut and the builders were about to ride in to the head station to sign up, and arrange for a station team to come out and cart the timber onto the job. Of course the right thing to do was to contact Boss Townshend or his deputy and regretfully withdraw from the verbal arrangement (for the meantime anyway), but the Mates were scared of missing out on the droving trip. However, they were sure of one phase of the "walkout": the work already accomplished was definitely on their side of the credit ledger (although they had drawn heavily on rations etc.) and they comforted their consciences
"muchly" with this knowledge. Eventually Harry wrote Boss Dicky Townshend a "naise" letter explaining everything, but no reply was forthcoming, nor was one expected, and that was that. Incidentally, when the lads met a bloke up from the Victoria River in Darwin the following wet season, he informed them the timber for the yards at the Folly was still lying out in the bush, and that was the last the Mates ever heard of the Price's Folly job.

However a bit of a disappointment awaited the Lads on contacting Herb at the Pigeon Hole: he had all the "ringers" he wanted but was short of a cook and a horse-tailer. Herb noted the budding Northern Territory ringers' disappointment, and reminded them he paid good wages and tucker, and furthermore guaranteed them that once through the dangerous lancewood country of the Murranji Track he would give them ringers' jobs, as he thought he could probably pick up a cook and a tailor at the "Castle" (Newcastle Waters, on the Overland Telegraph Line). The wages were four pounds ten a week and tucker. This amount including overtime rose to upwards of three hundred per cent during the next very few years, and comparatively it was well worth it! Fair enough, the Mates agreed to give it a go, and agreed to contact Herb's mob soon as possible on the track between Wave Hill and Montejinni (pronounced Montaginnie), an outstation on the eastern boundary of Victoria River Downs.

It was humorously pitiful to see the way some of the Old People went on, on realising the Lads were off, especially the elderly folk, some of whom on the morning the Mates pulled out, actually cut their heads with anything sharp enough till the blood ran over their faces and body, setting up a great wailing the meantime. The Lads knew this was a custom of the myalls and semi-civilised blacks when they are emotionally upset at deaths, partings, meeting old friends after long absences etc.,
but they were surprised at a turn being put on for them. They had not realised how popular they were with the Old People (for what it was worth, and it certainly hadn't been sought). They had apparently been more kind and generous than they themselves thought. They decided they would have to practise more tact in future, or they would be earning the displeasure of the "old-timer" whites.

Jareena and Noonah put on an act and refused to be hunted, but the Lads suspected the girls had it all sown up, their blue heaven had to come to an end sooner or later. They wanted to go right along with the Mates, and refused to be comforted with the balm that Bill and Harry would be back in a few weeks. They were also consoled with an extra liberal present of tucker etc.. The Mates had just laid in heavily on rations, the greater portion of which they would not now want. However, it was noticed they wailed somewhat, but there was no blood-letting. As a matter of fact the Lads were sorry to be breaking with them, but they knew they had to sooner or later. They had no intention of going combo (native). Richard and Ada were well looked after as regards the final hand-out. An appropriate tucker present was also given the sponging "relatives'" camp, through a couple of their decrepit old men "Counsellors"; so with their usual custom of sharing all tucker, everyone got something. Of course they all looked pleased, most wearing broad grins.

Well! The Lads found it a pleasure to please them in this way, and they never had any cause to regret same. But as explained, it was not the usual custom to treat the blacks so liberally, and the Old Hands would regard the Mates' policy ref. same as "spoiling the niggers". And come to think of it the Old-timers were right, for what would happen if all the whites "spoil the niggers?" In the end it would be detrimental to both whites and blacks. And the latter result was confirmed by some
of the church etc. missions; the semi-myalls could be spoilt by over liberal treatment. The centuries old adage appertaining to all "uncivilised" blacks - "give a nigger a inch and he'll take a yard" - was once more confirmed as pretty true.

Herb Cuthbert had a good droving plant, quite modern for the time and place. A not too heavy wagonette drawn by any number of light horses when necessary, and a buckboard that was used for speedy running about with light loading, was pulled behind the wagonette when not in use. Packsaddles were always available when wanted, from the ringers' gear stowed on the wagonette. About eighty horses went along with the plant, including some thirty belonging to the ringers. Herb was short of saddles and allowed the Mates a small amount for using their own, but he couldn't allow the ringers anything for the use of their own horses, he had plenty of his own trained to the work. Nearly all droving plants out that way were packhorse outfits. A farrier's forge etc. was packed along, and most stockmen could shoe a horse. Owing to the stony nature of a lot of the country, all working horses were kept shod (shoeing was also necessary on all the Victoria River stations). There were fifteen hundred bullocks and speyed cows in the herd, which made them a "big mob". There were also plus a few killers, which of course supplied the hands' meat when necessary, but it was sometimes purchased from adjacent stations. It took about one man per hundred head to handle the mob, including boss, cook, horse-tailer and ringers; and any number of black stockmen could be induced to go along temporarily.

The Lads picked the mob up as it was approaching Montejinni (an Aboriginal name meaning, where dingoes abound). The travelling had been
north-easterly from Wave Hill, but when Montejinni\(^1\) was passed away to the left the direction changed easterly, and the mob were on the Murranji Track; headed for Newcastle Waters on "Th'overland".

The Mates took over at the Pigeon Hole, from the two stand-in ringers acting as cook and horse-tailer and Harry, winning the toss, took on the horse-tailing first, and it was agreed they change over from tailer to cook once a week. In the event they helped each other considerably, and it was a question at times who was cook, and who horse-tailer. Two local Muddy boys, mere youths, went along with the plant to help the tailer out, and they were invaluable whilst they lasted, although only being paid with their tucker and tobacco. They were compelled to wear trousers and a shirt of sorts, but stripped the latter off whenever a chance offered. Their sobriquets were Ginger and Snowball, but why, heaven only knew?! One was anything but redheaded, and the other black as the ace of spades. Today, 1964, they would have been paid something like a fiver a week and tucker, and would have been well worth it: a little more civilised and cleaner of course.

Well! Horse-tailing and cooking had its advantages. Holders of these jobs were not expected of course, to do a two hours night trick around the cattle, and the Mates knew from experience it was more or less an exacting and weary job. The cook and tailer were obliged to roll out in the morning before piccaninny daylight, but they'd had a several hours unbroken sleep. It was not as boring on the whole, as moving cattle slowly along, once they had properly quietened down. The tailer was responsible for keeping the loose horses together overnight, but as key

\(^1\)"Montigenni" in original. Subsequent spellings have been changed, except where otherwise indicated.
horses were belled and hobbled and the boys did most of the actual work, the job was not so arduous or difficult. The ringers caught and saddled their own mounts once they were brought into the camp, but it was the tailer's job to have the night horses ready hitched and saddled in case the mob made off in a rush during the night.

The track up from the Pigeon Hole to "Montaginnie" (as pronounced) was not so hot, becoming more stony and ridgy as that V.R.D. outstation (incidentally seventy miles easterly from the homestead) was approached. Just on a few miles past "Montaginnie" was the famous Top Springs waterhole in the Armstrong River, which emptied into the Victoria away to the west of "Montaginnie". A lovely all too short camp was enjoyed on the Top Springs water, amidst comparatively attractive and tall timbers. The Lads (to say nothing of the others) could have put a few days in here, but on again to the Murranji Track proper toward the "jump-up" and the tableland, was the order of the day. Amidst plenty of hedgewood at times now, and often enough well closed in. Still, there was a firm though oft times bumpy track to follow, and occasionally a barely dry crossing of several creeks running into the Armstrong.

The jump-up took a little navigating, but eight horses managed it OK. Nevertheless, quite a little winding about to reach the tableland some three or four hundred feet up, thence on to the Yellow Waterhole, passing hundreds (or thousands) of white ant nests and some stunted, gnarled timber, but the white ghost gums looked spectacular enough, with their polished and very white trunks. After leaving the "Yeller", the lancewood and bulwaddie scrubs thickened up, and it was also further through them, and the track exceedingly winding at times, the original trail makers picking the thinnest patches to hack and burn through. However, there were also dispersed some large and small Mitchell grass plains which made good camping for the cattle, same being availed of.
The cooking went off smoother than expected, there was nothing to it. What with Harry's knowledge of butchering, and Bill making a fair brownie and his mate a passable damper, between the two of them the tucker was kept up to the ringers in fair enough supply and quality. It was a good season and with the cattle in good nick, they were kept travelling ten to fifteen miles a day. The stock-route law obliged the boss drover to travel the mob at least ten miles per day, but this law was of course practised loosely enough, generally. The camp was moved daily to a site picked out by Boss Herb, who would ride on ahead to do so, leaving a "flag" of sorts prominently flying at the place selected, and the Lads with the boys made the new camp after passing the cattle on the way, in plenty of time to settle down and prepare the evening meal. The early northern winter weather was near perfect, green grass was plentiful and drinking water for the stock was no problem at all; there was plenty of moisture in the feeding about, and dew overnight.

The boss gave a minimum of instructions regarding all this routine, only "making himself heard" when he considered it necessary. He was a wise leader, and allowed his people all the responsibility practicable. Boss Herb ran a "good tucker camp", and there was variation from the usual damper and beef (the overdone staple diet of most camps those days) and the menu was graced occasionally with dried stewed fruit, blance-mance [?blancmange], jam, spuds and onions, raisins and once a week believe it or not, a seven pound tin of butter was opened up. There was always plenty of tea and sugar, and sometimes canned milk. But of course the ringers were only human, and after a couple of weeks as their routine became monotonous, a favourite pastime was criticising the cook and the "poor tucker".

There were two or three travelling mobs on ahead, and a mob from the Big Run a couple of days behind. In really dry seasons this Murranji
Track was too waterless to be used, and the alternate route entailed many more hundreds of miles' travelling away round north: it was generally referred to as "about a thousand miles further"; probably an exaggeration! Another exaggerated saying of those days was: "You could travel a thousand miles eastward from the Victoria River per the Murrani and Barkly Tableland without passing through a fence or seeing a white woman." They could have also added, "and without passing a motorcar." Well! The Lads were to see a car in due course and a white woman too, and nearing Queensland pass through a couple of fences also, but these were red letter occasions.

The Murrani Track took its name from the waterhole of the same name. The Track twisted about for some one hundred and fifty miles, from Top Springs on the Armstrong River (tributary of the Victoria) at the western end, to Newcastle Waters Telegraph Station on Th'overland, at the eastern end. The word Murrani in either Mutpura or the Tjingili dialects (or both), meant frog (the Frog Hole). There were three semi-permanent waterholes along the Murrani. It was some fifteen miles from Top Springs to the Yellow Waterhole (set in yellow clay), the Ben-Cook-We-Charra, meaning "Lilyseed Water" to the Mutpura tribesmen, and Ben-Kootch in the Tjingili dialect, meaning Devil Water. Then a good fifty on to Murrani, and thence the same on to the Bucket Waterhole, the "Irndra-Kootcha" of the Tjingili tribe, meaning "Night Owl Devil" (whose feathers they used for certain ceremonial corroborees), named by Sam [Croker] and Bluey [Buchanan], who originally left an old bucket there on a stump, some twenty miles north-west of Newcastle Waters. The track for long distances was more or less hedged in with thick belts of bulwaddie and lancewood (hedgewood, the

2See Introduction, Ch.5, p.76.
"Ka-Now-In-Ja" of the Tjingili ... meaning "spears"), and the track wound about a great deal through it, which lengthened the distance considerably (as against a straight line "as the crow flies"). (Today, 1964, an eight chain wide straight track has long been bulldozed out, considerably shortening the distance.) The hedgewood ranged up to some forty miles north and south of the track, and in places was dense and practically impenetrable. The hedgewood gradually cut out nearing the Bucket Waterhole. It was notoriously bad cattle travelling country, they were always "jumpy" amidst the hedgewood and would suddenly rush at "a few falling leaves", at any time. Crashing into the hedgewood, there would be a terrible scatter and mess, sometimes many being more or less badly wounded and a few killed, spiked to death on the broken splintered hedgewood. Often many beasts had to be destroyed (shot), and it sometimes took days and weeks to muster the remainder. The more open semi-desert became worse to the south of the track, and stretched away void of any settlement for upwards of a thousand miles south and south-westwards to the Nullarbor Plain.

All this expanse of desert and semi-desert including the Murranji Track, was truly terrible country. During dry summers the waterholes dried up early, say August-September onwards, and even odd drovers with stock amongst other more unexperienced travellers took foolish risks, and finding the waterholes unexpectedly dry, suffered an awful death. A few got through after a terrible perish. The gold rush to the Kimberleys, which started in 1886, induced many miners to take this short cut from Newcastle Waters, and many (how many will never be known), not being bushmen, perished of thirst and fever. There are eleven men known to have been buried around the Murranji Waterhole, some from the prevailing malaria fever, the others because they took the risk and found the holes dry. Some are known to have left the track in
delirium, which of course was certain death; and again let it be stated, how many will never be known. The dingoes and crows scattered their bones, and the wind-blown sand soon covered them.

Only too often there was no way of telling if the holes were dry or not. No phones of course, and no traveller or habitation handy to glean information from. And so the risk was often taken, but more so by the inexperienced "bushmen" amongst the travelling prospectors. Wheeled traffic helped "make" the road from the late eighties onwards, including the famous wagon that was later besieged by myalls near Jasper Gorge, and so stoutly defended by Mulligan and Ligar.

Bluey Buchanan and his mate Greenhide Sam Croker were the first whites to actually travel this track (via the Murranji and Yellow waterholes). Bluey was apparently more tactful and successful with the blacks (the Tjingili in this case) than explorer John McDouall Stuart in 1861 and previous, when he finally realised he could not penetrate the waterless hedgewood scrubs on his attempts to reach the Victoria River to the west, from Newcastle Waters. He was then obliged to retreat south. There is this to be said about Stuart's failure and Buchanan's success: Stuart was up against the wild, determined myalls who previously had not seen a white man, and the tribesmen during his journey northward had been fighting more or less pitched battles with the invaders in attempts (and at least one success - Attack Creek) to bar their progress, whereas Buchanan had the advantage of the Aborigines having been softened up previously by Stuart in his several attempts (including the successful one of 1862) to reach the Northern Australian coast. And then in 1872 the putting through of the Overland Telegraph Line, and the very necessary undertaking for years afterwards, of teaching the blacks to respect the white man's wishes; in reference to the same enterprise. The blacks would thus be comparatively civilised in Buchanan's time, as compared to Stuart's.
The very first white people to cross this most difficult stretch of country was a G.R. Hedley and his party (who they were and what they were up to the writer has not ascertained) who crossed from Th'overland to the Victoria River a few months earlier than Sam Croker the same winter. Hedley had great difficulty in getting through, the hedgewood being even thicker to the north of the Murrani where he crossed, and a waterless stage of eighty miles was surmounted, the party only just getting through, experiencing a narrow shave from perishing.

Greenhide Sam Croker was second to successfully tackle the crossing, approximately June of the same winter, and of course he would be accompanied by at least one Mutpura boy. Sam was tracking straying Wave Hill cattle. The party was helped by some rain during the trip, and apparently it was at least a fair season. Crossing on the southern side of the Murrani, he would have less trouble than Hedley and his party in negotiating the thinner hedgewood. The cattle were tracked right through and under Th'overland (Telegraph Line), well on to the Barkly Tableland to Anthony's Lagoon and Corella Lake. The big stations of the Tablelands were then experiencing their initial pioneering phase. Returning to the vicinity of Newcastle Waters, Sam fell in with Nat "Bluey" Buchanan who was on the way to Wave Hill with a hundred head of horses from Queensland. It was July and some rain had fallen a few days earlier, and white frosts were recurring. It was over two hundred miles by the unexplored direct western route, but many more hundreds by the alternate known northern one.

The two friends decided to look into the possibilities of using the direct but unknown route. So Bluey looked after the stock whilst some friendly Tjingili blacks led Sam to the mysterious Murrani Waterhole about fifty miles out from the Bucket, and now for the first time visited by a white man. He then returned to Th'overland and the Mates
shifted the camp and stock to the Murranji. After a short rest at the waterhole, the same blacks piloted the whites to the Yellow Waterholes, over a fifty or sixty mile dry stage. To Armstrong Creek (a tributary of the Victoria River) was now only a short distance, so the blacks were rewarded and dispensed with. The friends then had some one hundred and twenty miles' travelling southwards to their main Wave Hill camp.

Young Bill and Harry Jones noted (along with much other yarning amongst the ringers in reference to early pioneering of that particular country) that odd ones believed that another party altogether were first across the Murranji Track. As a matter of fact several parties crossed or attempted to do so within a few months, during the winter of 1886; that is the desert between Newcastle Waters westward to the Victoria River, other than by the Murranji Track, but the writer (after going into the matter with the data of the Sydney Mitchell Library to examine) feels sure Nat "Bluey" Buchanan and "Greenhide" Sam Croker were the first across the Murranji Track. A party favoured by odd old-timers were the Goodliffe brothers (Charlie was the leader), accompanied by two men named Hill and Forsyth. As a matter of fact they crossed two or three months later than Buchanan and Croker. Probably they were second across the Murranji, and at that they actually missed out on the Yellow Waterhole. Their adventures on the trip make most interesting reading (to any one keen on Australiana generally) and gives us some idea of the difficulties, hardships and risks experienced, more or less, by all outback pioneers of those days.

During the winter of 1886, Charles Goodliffe's party with a big mob of horses on their way to the West Australian Kimberley goldfields, had reached Newcastle Waters. Manager Cass of Newcastle Waters station showed them a map which made the distance from that spot west to Hall's Creek (an absolutely unknown route) approximately three hundred miles as
against some seven hundred miles by the well-known track per Katherine and a northerly and westerly sweep round to the Victoria River and down through V.R.D. and Wave Hill, thence westerly over the Northern Territory and Western Australian border.

The party decided to try the direct route. Manager Gass had learnt from the blacks there was a waterhole out in the desert they called Murranji. Charles' party managed to locate same by following the tribesmen's foot pads, and a party of blacks camped at the waterhole were surprised and quickly made off. The following day two of the party tracked the disturbed campers (apparently the whites were at this time unaccompanied by any Aborigines) about thirty miles to a soakage, back in the direction from which they came (more about this water later in the narrative). A "boy" (a mere youth) was persuaded to accompany the two whites back to their Murranji camp to act as a "guide", and eventually a second boy was enticed to join up as company for the former.

The following day Charles Goodliffe's brother and the man Hill went out into the desert searching for water (presumably to the westward), taking one of the boys with them. Four days later about nine p.m., the boy staggered back to camp "all in". He carried a note from his two white bosses asking for help immediately, as they were perishing of thirst. Forsyth and Charles Goodliffe started out at once, and travelled all night by the light of torches to enable them to run the boy's tracks back to the perishing whites. The two distressed men were located next day, in very bad condition. They were given the little water the rescuers brought and also their fresh horses, and after a rest felt recovered enough to make back to camp, leaving the other two comparatively fresh men to follow at leisure. The two rescuers, Charlie and Forsyth, made only steady progress that first day of their return journey.
On the second day, one of the horses died of thirst. The party were using the horses of the two rescued men, and they would be in a very bad way for the want of a drink. Their poor dog became demented and tore off into the desert; was not seen again. Charles and Forsyth were now beginning to suffer keenly themselves for the want of water, and they were well nigh knocked up physically after travelling all night. They decided to bleed the remaining horse and drink its blood. [It is] not known whether they carried this intention out, but if so it would have helped them little as excessive salt is contained in horses' blood. The writer has heard and read of such cases, but cannot recollect of a perisher saving his life this way: it was always the beginning of the end. Including the night they set out, the party spent their third night in the desert. Fortunately it was still winter. Forsyth now became very depressed, and his mate tried to cheer him up with the assurance that the two mates they had rescued would surely come to their aid soon as possible, and probably they would hear the camp horse bells, which could be heard even miles off: they "should hear them at any time now".

Next morning they had to force themselves to start walking, and fairly staggering a couple of miles that seemed like many more, just about collapsed for a spell. They were now feeling terribly done and almost mad with thirst. Then suddenly they were made delirious with joy at the sound of a bell, which was at once recognised as one of their own: a "condamine" (so called because the particular make were first used by the Queensland Condermine River settlers). Charles fired off his revolver, and the bell came closer and closer, and here was the rescuing party, the two men they themselves had saved from perishing a few days previously, and now they had repaid the debt by saving their rescuers. Charles' brother and Hill had given up hope of finding their missing mates alive, and then came the revolver shots.
After a drink of foul water which nevertheless tasted heavenly, some food and a rest, the perishing men felt much better. Returning to camp the following day, Charles set out for Newcastle Waters for a supply of meat. He calculated the distance about seventy miles. He brought back three fat cows and was under the impression they were the first cattle to visit the Murranji, but as already explained he was mistaken, Buchanan and Croker having been at the particular waterhole with cattle and of course horses, two to three months earlier. What is hard to understand is, how the tracks etc. of men and stock (Buchanan, Croker and stock) were so entirely obliterated in two or three months, so as not to be recognisable by Goodliffe's party during their several days stay at Murranji! They were not the type of men to deliberately discount the fact that white men had beaten them to "first across the Murranji", as it were.

The writer is under the impression that probably the Murranji was a sacred bora ground of the Aborigines, and to appease the anger of their spirit gods at the sacreligious invasion of their holy place by the white men, they eventually removed every item of evidence from the precinct of the waterhole, and obliterated all alien tracks leading up to and away from same. Even so, it was a wonder the boys accompanying Goodliffe's party did not "drop" something about the whole business. But then, it's truly wonderful how dumb an Aborigine can be when under the spell of the law of the tribe that silence reference a certain matter is imperative, on pain of death. Buchanan and Croker were practically invited to the waterhole by the Tjingili tribesmen, and perhaps the Murranji was not sacred ground to them, but very much so to the Mutpura who linked up with them on the west. Then again the bora taboo may have been off during the first visit by white men, but definitely right on during the stay of the second party. Wheels within wheels, even amongst the Aboriginals!!
Charles Goodliffe now decided to continue westward toward the Victoria River. He was accompanied by one of the boys and a new arrival, one Dave McKay, probably came out from Th'overland with Charles and the three "killer beefs". Poor McKay was eventually to perish in the Never-Never. When dying, he wrote his will on his leggings with a piece of charcoal, leaving everything to a sister.

Charles Goodliffe and McKay planned to steer due west, and with the rest of the party accompanying them for twenty-five miles with a final drink for the horses, they reckoned the animals would be good for another one hundred and twenty-five miles before knocking up. The second day (following the final drink for the horses from the packed water) they calculated having travelled forty miles. The black boy, a Tjingili, now in strange country occupied by the Mutpura, became frightened. He kept on repeating in a very depressed way, "Nanto tumble down; all about tumble down!" meaning, the party would all die unless they turned back. The whites were not now depending on the boy finding water, but wanted him as an interpreter should myalls be contacted. They were obliged to compel the boy to remain with them under threats of being shot, and kept a keen watch on him. The boy made several unsuccessful attempts to get away and was made to sleep between the whites, who took good care that he observe them handling and loading their rifles. He was also made to walk in front of them during the day. However, it became apparent later that the boy was frightened he would be killed by the Victoria River blacks for guiding white men to their hunting grounds.

On the third day out the boy was told they were going toward the sunset and would be sure to find water that day. The boy then assured them they would reach water before sunset. About two p.m. the party reached Rocky Waterhole at the head of the Armstrong Creek (a tributary
of the Victoria River), called "Malvola" by the blacks, presumably the Mutpuras. The waterhole was found by Goodliffe's party, 4 November 1886, and they reckoned the distance from Newcastle Waters about two hundred miles. Goodliffe went on to remark that the "blacks were very treacherous (presumably the Victoria River tribesmen), and a man dared not leave his camp even to get a billy of water, unless he carried his revolver with him." Goodliffe was very elated on reaching the Victoria River, under the impression that his party was the first to do so, travelling approximately west from Newcastle Waters.  

In a couple of days the cattle were camped on the Yellow Waterhole. Not much of a place! Cheerless surroundings, scattered white ant humps over the plain nearby, and a few bleak white gums. Odd men had perished around this hole, a couple of old miserable mounds testifying to same. A man called Hardcastle was speared whilst sleeping in his winter "nap" one cold night, but made civilisation and hospital, only to die of his wounds.

The hedgewood was beginning to close in and the cattle were already getting restive of it: fair enough warning the ringers reckoned. Off again next morning, and over fifty miles to the next water. However this was a fair enough season, and getting clear of the "Yeller" the following bright morning the Lads were in good cheer, and even the hedgewood, sparkling with dew, looked beautiful.

Some excitement the following night: the cattle bolted. A lucky one

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3The following sources have been consulted by Lavender in writing on the Murranji Track: Hill, The Territory, pp.298-303; Buchanan, Packhorse and Waterhole, pp.120-21; Charles Goodliffe, "The Condamine Bell", Walkabout, Vol.11, No.12 (October 1945), pp.26-27.
the ringers reckoned, for some reason there was not much vim in it. The mates learnt once more that cattle are somewhat temperamental about a stampede, and they will "turn it on lightly" or go flat out hell for leather and anything at all can happen. The ringers off shift were off with the ready waiting "night" horses within a minute of the unmistakable noise of the stampede. The boss generally picked a camp as free of the hedgewood scrubs as possible, a spot of open plain with anything from a few hundred yards up to half a mile or more room to move in, often occupying the camp of the mob travelling some three or four days in front of him, but always providing the previous herd had camped there quietly; for had they been restive, his own cattle would suspect it immediately, and follow suit. Fortunately Herb's mob was settled on a fairly open camp this night, and further luck, the herd by chance galloped in the direction of the roomiest open break free of timber and were pulled up fairly easily and made to ring: no casualties.

The boss now instructed his cook and horse-tailer to have night horses ready for themselves to give a hand in such an emergency, as they were "now in the bad travelling country, and they're just as likely to take fright at their own shadow in the moonlight." This arrangement suited Young Bill and Harry very well. They hoped, at that time, the herd would break often.

Two nights later the mob was off again. A more closed in camp this time and the boss had doubled the watches, suspecting trouble. Before the off trick ringers (including Bill and Harry this time) could take position around the stampeding herd, [a] portion of them were crashing through a projecting break of hedgewood. Ringer "Old Dick" yelled to Young Bill and Jonsey, "foller me", and made down the hedgewood a hundred yards or so to where he had noticed it had narrowed and thinned out. The Mates followed Dick through the thinly timbered narrow break,
and emerging on the other side turned it toward the head of the mob, making it just as the ringers on the other side, the "near side" incidentally, came racing round the head in the clear to turn the mob away from the hedgewood danger. This move was quickly in hand, and with just sufficient room the herd was got ringing.

The Lads, mounted on the boss's trained night horses, enjoyed themselves tremendously. No fatal casualties, but a few were badly enough "staked" and knocked about, and a couple of horns and much hide was missing. The Mates eventually realised ref. Old Dick's move through the narrow, thinly timbered break in the hedgewood, that a good ringer automatically immediately takes stock, as it were, on reaching a fresh camp, and observes the layout of the timber etc., against just such an emergency as experienced. Dick later proudly informed the Lads he had noticed the particular thin neck in the hedgewood, amongst other observations, including a bad patch well out in the clear to be avoided, too many white ant nest humps. These "magnetic" ant nests (so called because they are built in a concave shape up to some six feet high, and much higher further north, with the narrow ends facing north and south) are built around a tree stump, and can bring a horse and rider or horned beast down with serious consequences, especially the low ones, which are the more difficult to spot.

Two or three camps further on, the mob camped at the Murranji Waterhole. The Mates had learnt from Snowball and Ginger that they had read a smoke (signal) from the Murranji, that two camps of Abos were at present sitting down there, a party of Mutpuras and a desert group of the Bingongina from the south. One of the half-caste ringers (that is any caste but full blood) passed this information on to the boss, who got away earlier than usual, taking an experienced ringer with him for prestige (and incidentally they both wore their revolvers), to either
hunt the natives to hell out of it altogether, or see that they were
camped well off to the lee side: the cattle must not be allowed to get a
whiff of the myall smell. A decade or two earlier the whites would have
ordered the myalls off at the point of their guns, providing the
munjongs (another definition out that way meaning wild blacks) were bold
enough not to clear for their lives immediately the white man was
detected, but at the period of Herb Cuthbert arriving at the Murrani on
this occasion (1914), the Abos generally were wise enough to be found
camping well to leeward, and knew as well as the whites it was then too
strictly against the law of the all powerful "perleece" to shoot blacks
outright for nothing at all. So that in a case like this, if the
Aborigines called their bluff, there was nothing to be done but put up
with them. And the whites were wise enough not to pursue such a policy,
because of the face lost in their bluff being successfully called.
Nevertheless, it was considered a risk, something like asking for
trouble, to have myalls camped anywhere near the mob at all. And so the
Mates Bill and Harry poked along the track nearing Murrani Waterhole.

For the past few days the former had been doing the horse-tailing, and
the latter the cooking. The Lads were due to change over jobs for a few
days on reaching the Murrani. Young Bill cracked his whip to draw the
attention of the boys, and instructed them to keep the "spares"
(including all the horses not in use) close up behind the wagonette, so
that he could ride close in alongside his mate on the driver's seat, and
enjoy a good yarn. "Things were going all right," they reckoned, "this
was the life!!" All the same they would welcome the change to ringing
on getting out of this hedgewood country at the Cautle (Newcastle
Waters). Some of the worst of the hedgewood had gradually been cut and
burnt out by the settlers assisted by the blacks during the past couple
of decades, and it was apparent the track was at last being somewhat
gradually straightened out and distances shortened.
Mobs of generally a thousand and to fifteen hundred head were moving “in” (west to east) regularly in season these days, except during a drought of course, or toward the end of a dry winter as the waterholes dried up. The Lads had recently heard the story of the record dry stage for the track, put up by the Farquharson brothers of Inverway station (situated to the south-west of Wave Hill) when bringing a mob of a thousand across back in 1909, from Top Springs on the Armstrong River (tributary of the Victoria) to the Bucket Waterhole some twenty-five miles north-west of the Castle Waters, about one hundred and thirty-five miles “without even the smell of a drink”. It was submitted that travelling conditions were otherwise good, cool weather and overcast skies etc., but nevertheless was considered by the old-time ringers, as comparable to any record, anywhere.

Presently the herd were passed, strung out grazing slowly along. Then later the boss and ringer Jim were passed on their way back from the Murranji to the mob. Herb gave the Mates instructions ref. the camp to be taken up, and to strictly keep the myalls away from the camp, and well to the lee side.

The Lads found the Murranji Waterhole a typically lonely one, somehow; even for that particular "no-man's-land" desert track. Perhaps it was the knowledge of the dozen or so nameless graves around the place, most of them already unrecognisable, and the odd remaining ones just reaching that stage. What a hell of a place it would be, thought the lads, if one were compelled to camp there alone, or even one of a limited company. The place was pretty well closed in with scraggly scrub and the hedgewood further out, a bright spot in the landscape being odd late flowering bauhinias. Gnarled coolabahs and gums hung around the banks of the shallow eighty yard waterhole, and ghostly ant humps were in evidence, which added to the suggested macabre appearance. However,
getting on with the chores of cooking, and catching the night horses and observing the blacks camped well over to leeward and questioning Snowball and Ginger about them (apparently the Mutpura group had departed for some reason) there was no time to feel lonely; and getting near sundown here came the boss and the ringers with the cattle.

The boss didn't seem to like the idea of the Muddies clearing out unexpectedly. They had apparently had some sort of a difference with the Bingonginas and preferred not to remain in the locality. The latters' women had disappeared (hidden in the scrub), a bad enough omen. Boss Herb, with the ringer Jim (who was considered well up in a knowledge of the Abos), also picked up Young Bill, and clutching rifles across saddle pommels for prestige effect (they were already wearing revolvers), approached the myalls' camp. The blacks didn't apparently like the look of things, and grabbing their weapons made as if to bolt. Herb pulled his posse up and handing his rifle over, instructed Jim and Bill to remain where they were. He broke a green branch from a tree, and holding it forward (the sign of peace) rode toward the myalls who now decided to stand their ground, retaining their spears, but adjusting them to the peace sign position (points forward and downward: yes, points forward, the significance being the spears could not so speedily be fitted to the throwing woomeras). Herb had a protracted pow-wow with the Abos, but couldn't get anything out of them ref. the Muddies' departure, except that they "had got much tired and gone home".

Herb signed for Bill and Jim to come closer, but Jim could make nothing fresh of the pow-wow. Meanwhile, Bill had a good look round at the myalls. All but one of them were the lean, long-limbed fierce looking desert type, and directly Bill commented on same to Jim, who explained the odd thickset, bandy and better looking fellow would be a descendant of generations back, of "some poor coot of an early Dutch
sailor, shipwrecked or cast away on the West Australian coast and
claimed by a member of some tribe as a long dead member of the family,
who had returned from the spirit world coloured a lighter shade" (an
almost universal Aborigine belief). Jim explained it was not unusual to
see the type nearer the West Australian coastline, but seldom in the
desert areas. Such types often have lighter coloured hair and eyes,
continued Jim, who declared he had actually seen one with distinctly
blue eyes.

When the "Bingons" (vernacular for Bingongina) also quietly and
quickly cleared out at dusk, Herb liked the position still less, and
conferred further with Fred. Fred, who had been thinking the matter
over in the interim, submitted his theory thus. The Bingons (the more
wilder and uncivilised of the two groups) perhaps proposed a scheme to
frighten the cattle into a stampede and cash in on any fatal casualties
(all myalls dearly loved a gorge of beef), and they would be helped by a
fairly moonlight night. The Muddies, a quiet and civilised tribe by
comparison, knowing it was a very risky enterprise and not "worth the
candle", tried to persuade the Bingons from carrying out their
intentions, and eventually realising they would not be successful in
deterring them, they wiped their hands clean of it and cleared out for
other hunting grounds. However, they were only frightened of the white
man's wrath a little more than their neighbouring desert munjongs, and
thought better of warning the former what to expect. There was only one
thing they could do, explained Fred, clear well out, and if the Bingons
didn't call off their plans for a stampede, the Muddies would be away on
their extended walkabout, for a "long feller time", and in the ultimate,
that is just what happened [with] that particular Muddy group.

Boss Herb was not greatly impressed until Ginger and Snowball were
suddenly missed. They had gone for a walkabout too. The Mates had
noticed they had been somewhat subdued and frightened. Yes, frightened was right, they sensed or probably knew, somehow, more or less of what was doing, and wisely faded away. Incidentally, the Lads learnt some time later, that they were also away from station "civilisation" for a long time, scared that the white men and their "perleece" may grab any Abos at all over the trouble, and make an example of them. It had happened so often in the past.

"To be forewarned is to be forearmed!" Boss Herb arranged double ringer shifts, and the cook and horse-tailer had to help out. The usual seasonable south-east breeze prevailed, easing off to almost nil later in the night. The cattle were as far as possible kept bunched in the middle of a semi-open ampitheatre (as it were), for the Abos could be shrewd enough to know the whites would probably expect trouble from the lee side, there being no down wind to convey the myall stink to the cattle or even some of the keener nosed ringers, especially the coloured casts. And yet, they could even start a stampede from the windward side, hoping the whites would mistakenly consider the tribesmen too shrewd to make mischief from a position obviously so much to the Abos' disadvantage. Apparently the myalls were subtly cunning, more so than Bill or Harry ever suspected. And so Herb and Fred reasoned the matter over, and decided trouble could come from anywhere. Two picked men continually rode round the mob well out (a nervy and exacting position) with loaded rifles at the ready so as to be plainly observed, but not to be used unless absolutely necessary, as the herd, already being in a nervous state, would probably rush at the sound of the shooting, and anxious tension had of course already been unconsciously conveyed from ringer to stockhorse, thence to the cattle: they would be "off at the fall of a gumleaf". Cook Harry Jones kept the tea, coffee and brownie up to all ringers coming off trick, and Young Bill after his dogwatch
shift stood by the spare night horses. Herb was here, there and everywhere and seemed tireless, and of course as generally happens in such cases, some of the ringers lost a little of their keen "edge". Then, without warning in the small hours, it came, and the worst happened.

It was a bad break this time. A heavy hunting boomerang had been thrown from a comparatively great distance, and from a somewhat "neutral" position as regards the breeze (what there was of it), and from a point nearest the plant's camp. Some of the ringers distinctly heard the hum and bounce of the big boomerang, but it was never found. The old-timers later reckoned the tribesman that threw the weapon must have been a very powerful man, and game enough to slip in close when the outside riders were clear for the minute or so, of that section of their beat. The whites later reckoned the Abo. who executed the boomerang throwing must have been a very strong, game and intelligent nigger. A couple of the ringers thought they just saw a shade disappearing very speedily into the hedgewood, and as the mob was already off, they fired off several shots from their revolvers in the direction of the disappearing shadow, but the chance of hitting same was about one in ten thousand, and would only serve to make the fleeing nigs go faster, if same were possible. What surprised the ringers most was that the "boomer" which started the rush was actually retrieved by the tribesmen, for there was some scanty opportunity following the throwing of the weapon. The old hands were surprised to realise the nigger (or niggers, for the expert trackers amongst the ringers thought they picked out two or three sets of tracks) was not that frightened of the white man's guns as not to take the risk. The general verdict of the old hands seemed to be, "the cheekiest b---- of a nigger they had struck for a long while!"

It was quickly realised that nothing much could be done at once to
stem the stampede, as the herd had already tackled the hedgewood "en masse". Young Bill arrived on the scene with the few "off trick" ringers, Harry having been instructed to stick to his job and look after the spare horses also; and guard the camp: "Keep yer loaded rifle hand all the time, and don't unbuckle yer revolver: fire at any shadow yer suspicious of." The same tactics were pursued as in the previous rush, but it wasn't nearly so easy; a long way to the nearest narrow patch to slip through. But it could have been worse: the belt of hedgewood was only about fifty yards through to a clear break, and the worst of the stampede was over on the mob emerging into this clear "laneway" where they made a deviation to the left and followed up the narrow enough clearer "going". Well! The job of stopping the stampeding cattle and then finding all the stragglers and mustering them back to camp was the work of a couple of days, and at that Herb would [have] liked to have taken another day.

The whole "show" shortly became a ringers' rank and file "soldiers' battle", as it were, and natural leaders automatically took over for the time being. Young Bill along with a couple of others attached themselves to Jim (of the Aborigine knowledge) and his leadership was gladly accepted and followed: Jim led with calm confidence. Bill was to be reminded of Jim's leadership later on in some of the fighting of the Great War, when occasionally matters got out of hand with no "official" leaders on "tap", or none that the rank and file would take any notice of. The natural leaders took over and stood out like giants, some of them, till matters straightened out to the usual battle routine with the appropriate known officers in charge once more.

And so the scattered cattle were tracked down and gradually gathered into the fold. At the end of the second day Boss Herb thought that another day's searching might have paid off, as per his tally of the
casualties there could still have been a few, a very few, scattered over a large and difficult area, but he decided to move on as the mob following on behind were due at the water that evening, and he didn't want to cause them any undue embarrassment. The following mob would be stirred up more than enough sensing the recent smash, without the presence of the unfortunate mob that had suffered it. And so Herb gave instructions to pull out the following morning, much to the satisfaction of all hands, who had now thoroughly had the Murranji.

The stampede and "cleaning up" of same had extended over two days and three nights. The tally was short by some twenty head, and several were so badly injured that they were destroyed the following few days. The tribesmen had certainly done themselves well, if ever they followed their killing up, but from tracks found it was clear they had started something they couldn't handle, became scared and cleared off south deep into the desert. All hands were incensed at the myalls' behaviour, and there is no doubt that had any been sighted during the mustering, they would have been fired on with "intent to kill", so high was the indignation against them. The sight of the poor brutes cruelly staked, some of them to the death, was just not pleasant, and some were shot immediately. One great bullock had galloped chest-on to a parallel spiked, hard, dry and bare bulwaddie limb, and same had penetrated over halfway into the beast's "innards".

Bill and another chap became bushed for a while when returning to camp late with a few stragglers that had been found (that is tracked) some miles north-easterly from Murranji. On nearing camp in this moonlight, Bill and his mate were sent around a clump of hedgewood to spot for any stragglers. After about half an hour they decided there were none of the herd thereabouts, and decided to cut in toward Jim and his mate, who were pushing the few stragglers along and keeping a lookout on the
opposite side to Bill and Dan's diversion. It only took Bill a few minutes to realise he was bushed, and his mate (incidentally sometimes referred to as "dopey Dan") was well and truly bushed also. Dan at once wanted to go in a certain direction, but Bill refused point blank to follow him. Dan decided to stick by Bill. Bill would have been absolutely helpless and compelled to wait very many hours for sunrise to get his direction, but he remembered his experience of back in Queensland when he had extricated himself from just such a "bushing", guided by the Southern Cross star formation. And there it was plain as daylight, and Bill realised straight away that south was pretty well the opposite direction to where he had guessed it might be (a not unusual predicament amongst folk when bushed). Well! All that was necessary was to ride southwards two or three miles to strike the roughly east and west track from Murranji to the Castle, and take it west back to Murranji. As simple as that! And that's exactly what Bill did, followed by the mesmerised and admiring Dan (and Dan had been a few years in the Territory at that). A very careful lookout had to be kept for the track, which was not very plain in places, and Bill, to say nothing about Ned [sic], was pleased enough when same was picked up, plain enough and shining in the moonlight. The wanderers arrived back in camp shortly after Jim, who was feeling a little anxious about them. The lost ones were of course chiacked to no end, but when Jim had Bill explain how he had found his way out of the dilemma, the former was slightly impressed, much to Young Bill's satisfaction, whose stocks as a Northern Territory bushman had risen overnight.

And so the tired and weary cavalcade moved away from the Murranji Waterhole, feeling unlucky, especially Boss Herb; but they knew, particularly the old hands, it could have been much worse. Bill and Harry agreed they'd now had all the stampedes they wanted, of that
nature anyway. They wouldn't mind a "ding-dong" one again, but providing it was out on the open plain. And even that came in due course.

Another very interesting story was discussed whilst passing through this country: the finding of a mysterious waterhole in the desert hereabouts some years earlier, the position of which had become lost and never relocated. Some said the story was a myth, but most old-timers believed it on account of knowing the integrity of the men who found it. Through the usual source, the Sydney Mitchell Library, the tale has been sifted out and brought up-to-date. Probably before the turn of the present century, the two old-timers Alf Martin and Billy Miller were looking for a "mysterious" waterhole which they felt existed hereabouts. Miller was fairly conversant with some of the native dialects, and from certain information he had gleaned through this source he was convinced of a waterhole out in the desert hereabouts, which had never been visited by white men. The story is most interestingly told by the late Bill Harney in his book *North of 23°*, and with the kind permission of the people who are handling his affairs, I hereby quote from much of his account ref. the finding of this waterhole.

This lonely desert country was without creek or watercourse to give them a lead: not even a hill was visible to relieve the monotony. Boundless and eerie.... This area is inhabited by the ... Madbra (Mutpura? More likely to have been the Bingongina, the desert tribe to the south of the Murranji track - W.T. Nicholls) ... who live on the water ... they tap from trees or get from their native 'wells, which must be guarded strictly, yea, even to the death. No cajoling or bullying would induce them to betray the whereabouts of these secret wells to the white man, since he, with his horses, would perhaps at one drink drain a supply which would keep a family alive for months.

This hesitation to lead the white men to their water, soon began to wear thin under pressure, the diabolical tortures thought up by determined and sometimes desperate white men, who had to have the water
or perish. Some blacks died before they would betray the water, others
gave way under torture, and some of these were killed by their tribesmen
in consequence: for instance the tribesmen who betrayed the water to the
whites at Tanami goldfield. Bill Harney continues:

Then, in the bush nearby, they heard the barking of dogs, and
instantly knew that natives, or maybe their camp, were close by.
Galloping in the direction of the dogs' barking - perhaps at a
lizard they had run up a tree - they came upon a little group of
lubras huddled together and trembling with fear. Instantly on
the alert in fear of being ambushed, they looked around to see
if any of the buck males were about.

The aborigines had learnt from experience that neither white
nor black man would destroy a woman, so they would tell them
when such a crisis as this arose, to lie down. Then they would
plan elsewhere to use the women as a decoy, so that at the right
moment they could launch their attack....

As these women faced the oncoming horses, they tried to
smile, yet ever they trembled and their eyes betrayed their
fear. Jumping from his horse, Billy asked: "Which way water?"

Immediately they replied: "Which way water".

Again he questioned: "Where camp belong you all about
blackfellow?"

Again they repeated what he said. In his travels he had
often met these uncivilized people, for he had been here many
years before.

Some more questions were then asked (meaning nothing at all) and
regularly answered by repetition (as best the Aborigines could pronounce
same), much to the amusement of his mate Ben Martin who now laughingly
remarked, "Try them in one of the native tongues of these parts."

So Billy talked in the language of the Warramungu tribe who
were over two hundred miles away.

"Napa unda pun?" - ("Where is water?")

One woman's face lighted up at these words. Quickly she
spoke to the trembling women, who all nodded in return. Then she came close to Billy and, rubbing him with her hands, in a sad tone exclaimed: "Yinda Warramungu, yanee - pointing to herself - Warramungu".

They called aloud and from the bush came an answering cry from the native men. Then all headed into the timber, where presently they came upon the mystery waterhole, unknown to the whites till they saw it. The natives told them it was called "Din ninnie", and strange though it may seem, that water is unknown today.

Years after, the old woman, whose name was No alley, was working on a station through which Billy was passing. She remembered him, and they talked of the time she had seen him out in the desert.

"We been proper fright longa deemana (horse). No more longa man only that. Deemana benngee poonba." (His nostrils showed that he was angry.)

The horse was a quiet one, but these people had never before seen this strange animal. Owing to some irritation in its nostrils the animal happened to be snorting and showing its teeth. Because a native's nose "swells up" when he is angry, these people looked upon the snorting of the horse as a sign of anger, and were afraid that this strange monster would attempt to bite them. It was Billy's voice speaking in the known tongue of the Warramungu that stayed their fears; they realised that there was a friend who could control this savage monster.

Well! By the time the Mates Young Bill and Harry Jones passed that way, A.D.1914, the desert tribe, or some of them, could speak pidgin English fluently, and they had become quite used to horses. A human and pathetic story! Well may the "dying out" Aborigines of those days (and they were assuredly dying out at that time) have wailed, "Poor feller me! Poor feller me!"

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4Harney, North Of 23°, (Australasian Publishing Co., Sydney, [1946]), pp.240-42. Some minor misquoted words and punctuation have been altered to comply with Harney. Tindale's spelling of the tribe referred to by Harney is "Waramanga".
It was suggested on this particular trip of Boss Herb's, that the "mystery" waterhole "discovered" by Alf Martin and Billy Miller could be the one found by the Goodliffe brothers' party during the winter of 1886, for same had apparently never been located since. But the older hands insisted otherwise, whatever the merits of the Goodliffe brothers' story but conceded it was just such another waterhole.

The writer is inclined to agree with the old-timers, that it was a different water altogether, as the Goodliffes made it clear their find was in an easterly direction from Murranji, where as Martin and Miller's find was "to the south" (apparently meaning to the south of the Murranji Track, and deeper down in the desert country): the more probable conclusion!

However, along came the string of artesian bores in the twenties, and certain mysterious waterholes lost their fascination. They were no longer necessary, and certain drivers of mechanical "stock trains" that speed along a comparatively good and straight Murranji Track couldn't care less about them! Why should they!

Incidentally, the writer has always had something in common with Bill Harney (the "Bilarney" of the Northern Territory Aborigines) since a chance meeting with him "behind the line" in Belgium or Northern France near the end of the great "Third Ypres Stunt", 1917. Young Bill was then a "digger" in the First Battalion, and entertaining his personal cobbers in an estaminet, telling them of his experiences in the Northern Territory before enlisting for the war. Bill noticed a nuggety full-faced young fellow wearing the colours of the Ninth Battalion (a Queensland unit) seemed very interested in what he, Young Bill, had to say (today, some forty-seven years later, it would be said that he was quietly "listening in").
Bill's cobbers had soon "had" him and his Northern Territory experiences, and were about to move off to another favourite estaminet. The interested Ninth Battalion digger's cobbers were also waiting on him before moving off. But they had a couple more minutes to wait whilst the nuggety "dig" approached our Bill and remarked how interested he was in what he had heard of the Northern Territory explaining he had "knocked about the far west of Queensland a lot, and always intended to have a look at the Territory." Said he was "going straight there if ever he had the luck to get clear of this hell". Both lots of cobbers were now impatiently waiting for the two laggards, who now shook hands, exchanging names and particular Company of their Units, the nuggety Queenslander remarking he would look Young Bill up at opportunity and have another yarn about the Territory. His name was Bill Harney, but Young Bill straight away forgot it, and the two never met again.

But here's an interesting sequel. Young Bill never went back to the Northern Territory, but about the mid-fifties he began to plan a long tour through the Northern Territory and became interested in Bill Harney's books on those parts. In one of the first read, there appeared a good picture of the author. Young Bill (now Old Bill) knew at once he had met this writer somewhere, but where? In a later book read, "Bilarney" just incidentally happened to mention "his old Cobbers of the Ninth Battalion", and it came back to Old Bill in a flash: the nuggety young fellow of the Ninth Battalion he had met near the border of France and Belgium in 1917 had the luck to get back, and in due course make the Northern Territory. He had become a popular author on Northern Territory subjects by the mid-fifties. It's a small world, and strange how things turn out!^5

^5The preceding three paragraphs concerning Bill Harney appear in a different context in the original typescript: they follow the paragraph ending "ref. the finding of this waterhole." (above).
Fifteen years previously to [?after] the Mates Bill and Harry sojournning through this country, there occurred a nasty tragedy with a modern touch. Some eighty miles south-westerly from Murranji Waterhole (and approximately ninety-five south-east by east from Wave Hill homestead), out in the harsh lonely "desert" (semi-desert really), is the spot where Keith Anderson of New South Wales and Bobby Hitchcock of Western Australia, and both of the R.A.A.F., were forced down in their small monoplane the Kookaburra, in March 1929, and within a very few days died a terrible death of thirst. They had been searching for the late Sir Charles Kingsford Smith ("Smithy") and his crew, who were forced down in the Kimberleys (W.A.) and lost for some days. Smithy was to fly his famous old Southern Cross round the world (but subsequent to the Kookaburra tragedy the venture was postponed for the time being).

A searching plane spotted the grounded monoplane and the bodies of the two airmen, and soon as possible a horse riding party under Lieutenant Eaton (presumably of the R.A.A.F.) set out from Wave Hill for the scene of the tragic grounding, guided by an encircling aeroplane. The plane broke down and the party had difficulty and much delay in locating the Kookaburra, and when eventually arriving at same were so low in water that they barely had time to bury the bodies in shallow graves.

Eventually the Thornycroft motor company financed an expedition to go out in their large four-wheel drive vehicle (claimed by the company to be the first four-wheel drive in Australia), and bring in the bodies for decent burial. This task was accomplished after overcoming very many difficulties, the lost plane being sighted on 13 June, 1929. The plane was left in the desert and in all likelihood is there today, what is left of it, after grass or bush fires and time have claimed their toll.

But here is the cruelest irony of the tragedy: the Thornycroft party
discovered "only a short distance" from Kookaburra a large "blow-hole" in the desert, and in the bottom was "a big pool of water". (Just like that! And it was probable enough the only water within fifty miles or more.) The element that could have saved the lives of the young airmen, only a "short distance away". But at that it would have perhaps taken a lot of methodical searching to find it, and the airmen were busy trying to clear enough runway through the scrub and getting their plane airworthy again. When this plan failed after two or three days, their water, to say nothing of suitable food, was finished, and of course they would be feeling very weak. The desert terrain was mercilessly flat, no hills or rises or trees to spot from, and the sun can be very hot out there in April, especially in the desert without shade. The young airmen died before a searching plane spotted the Canberra.

Apparently the flight over Central Australia was taken too lightly by Anderson and Hitchcock, who whilst refuelling for the last time at Alice Springs declined the advice of experienced people used to the arid Centre, to take more water along with them, in place of some of the petrol. The flyers also knew their plane was not performing on "tops". It appears it should positively have been doing so for a flight of the nature attempted. One cannot read of the risks taken on the flight, without forming the conclusion that the airmen's deaths was a tragedy of inexperience, hard luck, and impetuous and brave youth.

As recent as July 1961, the Kookaburra (what was left of her) was found by a Territory Administrative Survey party under Senior Surveyor V.T. O'Brien, who were working on a proposed stock-route from Wave Hill eastwards to Powell's Creek on the Stuart Highway, some two hundred miles as the crow flies. The surveyors travelled forty miles south from Wave Hill homestead, then east for eighty-seven miles, where they stumbled by chance on the plane. These facts reference direction and
mileage makes the plane wreckage approximately ninety-five miles south-east by east from Wave Hill homestead, as the crow flies. Apparently the survey party were not all expecting to come on the wreckage, and didn't at first realise its identity. The wing and body fabric had disappeared, but the metal framework, engine and one spoked wheel were still there.

The party wound up towing one of their vehicles one hundred and fifty miles to Powell's Creek. No water was located on the journey until within a few miles of Powell's.\textsuperscript{6}

\textsuperscript{6}This story concerning the Kookaburra is taken from a magazine article, possibly in the Australasian Post. Cuttings from the magazine are contained in one of the original copies of the typescript.
Chapter 22

ON TO THE CASTLE AND THE BARKLY

The trying events of the Murranji Waterhole seemed to have forged a camaraderie amongst all hands of Boss Herb's droving personnel, akin to the spirit of confidence and mateship that Young Bill and Harry were to experience later in their association with the "Diggers" during the heavy fighting of World War One. But there were reservations to this spirit of mutual mateship and goodwill, which now and again palled more or less under the strain and monotony of a long droving trip. Trifling inconveniences, the wrong word being spoken at the wrong time, a fellow's tobacco ash being blown near one's person, and so on, became very serious matters. "Words" and uncomplimentary language would be exchanged, and occasionally there was a ding-dong fight. Then something unusual would happen, say the sudden appearance of a droving party making westward to pick up a mob on the Victoria. They would sometimes camp adjacent for a night, and there would be much exchanging of news ref. to what was going on "inside" including also news of the "outside" world via Palmerston and the Castle, or via Cloncurry and Camooweal in Queensland, with the ringers travelling east from the Victoria, who would relate the latest gossip from that country. The spell would be broken: came a brightening of personalities all round, smiles and good mateship once more. God was in His heaven, and the world was not a bad place to be in after all.
Came a late evening tea around the camp some days out from Murranji. Three or four old ringers had become disgruntled with "the poor quality of the tucker" put on. Disparaging remarks re: same had been overheard, and although it was Bill's turn at the cooking helped by Harry who was now doing his turn at the horse-tailing, it was the latter that "bit", and Bill could see that if the disgruntleds didn't wake up to themselves and keep quiet, Harry would sooner or later "blow up" and go for them.

Stew for tea that night, and pretty good considering same was made from freshly corned beef with the salt well soaked out, and containing onions, (still a few left) and desiccated (dried) spuds, dried peas and a couple of handfuls of flour. Really a good show for a droving plant of those times.

Three old disgruntleds were grouped apart and were amusing themselves passing uncomplimentary remarks anent the cook's poor showing. "Oh no; not bloody old stew again!" remarked one amidst derisive chuckling from his mates, followed by similar critical remarks, harmless enough really, and Bill was pretending to cower and grimace from a position behind the wagonette unseen by the disgruntleds, but in view of the rest of the company including the boss. The latter group pretended to be in sympathy with the growlers and spurred them on with an occasional sympathetic remark, winking at the cook the meantime. Bill was really enjoying the fun, but he noticed once more his mate had just about had enough of it, and then one of the trio remarked, "I'm pullin' out at the Castle, what about youse blokes?"

Long Jonsey then blew his Irish top and became a terrible raging madman within the fraction of a second. Picking up the bucket of remaining stew he threw the contents at the ducking malcontents, and
sent the kerosene tin bucket after it. Fairly salivating at the mouth, he challenged the three to fight, "one at a time or altogether, Kelly's rules bar nothing," called them all the b----- under the sun, and worse. Bill was enjoying it all, this time he was not the victim, and the disgruntleds were only getting what they asked for anyway. Bill glanced at the boss, who seemed to be calmly taking the situation in with a quizzical grin, watching Jonsey and his victims closely, but of course he'd been used to all this before and was quite capable of handling matters if he considered they were getting out of hand. He apparently reckoned instantly, the now cowering and "squaring off" malcontents would not attempt to stop this madman, and the latter would let it go at that. The rest of the company seemed to be enjoying the rumpus but were obviously amazed at the wild ferocity of the otherwise jovial and likeable Irishman. Meantime the wildman was threatening that if he ever heard so much as a "peep" out of them again, he'd rub their bloody noses in it, and worse. However, this time Jonsey didn't get over it so quickly, and when he did have occasion to speak to them, it was more of a command than otherwise. They pulled out and were replaced at the Castle, and nobody seemed sorry about it.

Ginger and Snowball were missed a bit around the camp, but by coincidence(?) two Tjingili boys "Bertie" and "Jimmie" turned up on the mob approaching the Bucket waters. It appears they had heard the plant was in need of them. They were allowed a try-out and proved OK, remaining with the plant as far as Anthony's Lagoon. It was learnt later through the coloured ringers, they had picked up a smoke from the Muddies sent the long way round, that "two feller allaright boys" would probably be allowed to tail along with Boss Herb's plant. Candidly, the Mates were very pleased to have a couple of boys as "rouseabouts" again, even only a few days before changing over to ringers' jobs at the Castle, especially in connection with the horse-tailing.
On approaching the Castle, it was a pleasure to be in a more pleasant type of country, more open and studded with coolabah. Camped and eventually crossed the Newcastle Creek, and incidentally Th'overland Telegraph Line was passed under (two wires on steel posts strung low enough), the cattle being inclined to prop, had to be "pushed" under, and at that mobs were known to rush at the telegraph line, the first they'd ever experienced; and the horses were not much better, shying and snorting the meanwhile. The popular idea was to get the mob under when the wires were constantly humming, as when they suddenly changed from quietness to a lusty droning was a dangerous few seconds ref. a potential rush. The wheel tracks were also crossed that became the bituminised Stuart Highway some quarter of a century later, which connected Port Darwin (three hundred miles to the north) with the Oodnadatta railhead some thousand miles way down in South Australia. The ringers of those days reckoned it was about eight hundred miles travelling down to Stuart township, the famous Alice Springs of today.

The township of Newcastle Waters consisted of the telegraph station, general store with a "gallon licence" (which was then equivalent to a pub without a bar, but open for booze twenty-four hours a day), and Newcastle Waters cattle station owned by Steve and Harry Lewis. The station was originally taken up by Doctor W.B. Brown[e] in the early eighties, who was a well-known grazier and financier with wide interests in the North. But he had "gone broke" along with many others at the time owing to disadvantageous conditions: low price of beef, redwater and pleuro. (cattle killing diseases including buffalo tick), and last but not always least, depredations of the blacks, too many cattle stampeded and speared, to say nothing of men, mostly Chinese employees, particularly in Arnhem Land.  

1See Hill, The Territory, pp.178, 214.
A few ringers were camped about the Castle, some waiting for particular droving plants, others on the lookout for a ringer's etc. job. Seemed to be a favourite labour exchange centre, as it were. The Tjingili tribe (Tingillie in the vernacular) occupied the country around here, but they were fast disintegrating and dying out under the curse of the white man's touch.

Like all the tribes, these people believed pregnancy in their women (or it was their belief before sophistication after contacting the white man) was effected by other than sexual intimacy. This phase of the Aboriginal way of life has already been touched on, but the late ethnologist R.H. Mathews has handed on to posterity such a charming account of the Tjingili belief of such matters, and it reads so like a Hans Anderson fairytale, that it will bear recounting at any time. R.H. Mathews quotes:

The Chingalee believe that children are not the result of the commerce of the sexes, but when the woman first becomes aware of her pregnancy, she communicates the fact to her husband. As soon afterwards that a favourable opportunity occurs, he reports that when he and his wife were sleeping at such and such a place, he dreamt that just before daylight, he heard some little children laughing among the foliage of a tree close to his camp. Presently he felt something pulling his hair and heard a child's voice asking him to find a mother for it. He pointed to his sleeping wife, who was lying near him, and the tiny infant disappeared.

In this case it will be noted the husband "dreamt". Here is an example of the wife dreaming. Mathews continues:

Among the Kwarranjee, a south-western branch of the Chingalee, when a woman becomes conscious of the approach of the maternal function, she reports that she had a dream. A woman who was interrogated by one of my correspondents made the following statement. She dreamt that she followed a snake's track through the bush for some distance and came upon an infant lying on the ground. She went back, in her dream, and told another woman, who came with her and also saw the child. While the two women were looking about trying to find its mother and
wondering where she could be, the woman awoke. Some days afterwards she felt a child moving in her womb, and when it was born it was given the snake totem (because conceived in the vicinity of the snake track).

These people say that dreaming about finding infants belongs to the woman's department.²

And so the dreaming varies with different tribes. The Tjingili had always been renowned for making high quality boomerangs and shields etc. which were traded with eager though far away tribes. The boomerangs (non-return of course) were called kurrabuddies, and the shields cowarer.

Like most other tribes too, a peculiarity of their dialect is that such subjects as flowers, birds and their women have comparatively more pleasant sounding names, which to the ears of we white folk somewhat actually suggest the subject defined. For instance, masculine as against feminine names, for their men and women:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine Names</th>
<th>Feminine Names</th>
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<tr>
<td>Chakade</td>
<td>Ongalla</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tungaree</td>
<td>Ehralee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chunamah</td>
<td>Amladee</td>
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<td>Chunade</td>
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<td>Tapola</td>
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<td>Chumate</td>
<td>Naralee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Champachina</td>
<td>Nemora</td>
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During Bill and Harry's short sojourn at the Castle, a noted local character named Bates (later to become famous throughout the Territory

²R.H. Mathews, "Notes on the Aborigines of the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland", published in Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, Queensland, Vol.XXII, 1907. Odd words are different from those which appear in Mathew's paper. Emphasis and the words in parentheses were added by Lavender.
North as "Old Bulwaddie", was in visiting the township from his lonely block of country well up the Newcastle Creek from the township, where he camped with his Aboriginal following sometimes for months at a stretch, sharing their native foods and not seeing a white man for months. Like a lot of pioneering settlers all over Australia, he was miserably underfinanced when taking up his isolated country. When the late Professor Sir Baldwin Spencer called in there whilst en route to Borroloola from Newcastle Waters about the year 1910, a photo taken of the Beetaloo Downs homestead camp besides Bates Lagoon depicts a wretched enough camp, which seems very much out of proportion with the high sounding name of Beetaloo Downs.  

However, Bulwaddie stuck it out very well, developing a successfully unique way of handling his blacks, who worked well and were very loyal to him. Within the natives' hearing, he would pretend to converse with the crows, who caw-cawed back at him, telling him all the gossip of the blacks' camp (which he had shrewdly picked up in the meantime). He actually had the poor devils frightened of doing much that he disapproved of. They would have killed every crow they possibly could, but the "bors" forbade it. However, the "bors" treated them comparatively well, and in due course over the years, "came through" fairly comfortably.

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3Spencer was there in 1901. He describes the place:

It was just about the most primitive thing in the way of a station that could be imagined. There was an ancient tent-fly that covered a sleeping-room, all open - front, back and sides - close to this was a bough wurley that did duty as a dining and sitting room, with an old box that served as a table, but no such thing as a chair.

Like all Aboriginal tribes, the Tjingili were handicapped with a lively imagination that sometimes conjured up terrifying experiences for them, in encountering evil nightmare spirits; especially when they were alone, and worse, when compelled to spend a night out in the bush alone (and sometimes bad enough in company of small numbers).

Everybody knew the story of the Castle station boy looking for strayed cattle down in the desert scrub, who suddenly realised the afternoon was wearing on and he'd left it a little late to comfortably get back to the homestead before sunset. He'd had a lonely day and the weather had been cheerlessly overcast, and anyway, his tribe didn't care about this country when alone. It was known to harbour a particularly vicious type of scrub demon, a horrible looking little monster with wings like a bat.

The boy got to thinking of the evil things, and a shiver passed down his spine. Noticing a fine fat rat run under a thick low spreading mulga bush (all small marsupials are called rats out in that country), he dismounted and parted the low scrub with the butt of his stockwhip handle, anticipating a juicy roasted meal for tea. Quess of his horror when he actually observed one of these scrub demons under the bush "playing possum" (pretending sleep), for the boy noticed with a fluttering of his heart that the loathsome creature had one eye sufficiently open to watch him, and it glared evilly.

Shakily mounting his stockhorse, he immediately galloped for home (and one can imagine how the boy's panic was quickly "telegraphed" to the horse, which would go straight for home at a frightened gallop). After a mile or so the boy with an effort looked back (considered by his people unwise under the circumstances), and there was the demon trailing him closely, helped on by its great flapping wings. The horse was in good nick, but was now blowing hard and the pace was slowing up. Now it
was getting dark and only too often the devil's wings brushed him and its claws tore at his clothes and flesh (his clothes, of course, were all torn and his body badly scratched from continually brushing against the scrub). He could not help taking another look back, and horror of horrors the loathsome thing was riding on the horse's rump. As he urged his poor beast on to further effort, he glimpsed his people's camp fires and the station homestead lights. He just made the camp and fell senseless from the horse at the feet of his people.4

Incidentally, this phase of the primitive Aboriginal's imagination sometimes takes generations to eradicate, as substantiated quite recently vide a case in the Sydney press of the experiences of an otherwise assimilated Aboriginal family. Judging from the press pictures, the Caleys seem only a minor part Aboriginal, and apparently a family perhaps representing a cross-section of the local community. They were residing at the small "ghost" village of Alectown, some forty miles from Parkes in New South Wales. The township had once been the centre of alluvial gold-bearing country. A picture of the old "haunted house" depicts just an ordinary old-fashioned weatherboard cottage, and not exactly overgrown with shrubs, creepers etc. One feature of its environment may perhaps suggest a boost to the family's imagination: directly over from the house was a graveyard (just a "graveyard") and it was not even mentioned whether same was old or otherwise (generally "played up" as at least old in most ghost stories). Apparitions in the half century old cottage had terrorised the family of six including Mr and Mrs Caley and their four sons aged nine, ten, eleven and twelve years, for some fourteen months. The ghost was always an old man in

greasy old hat and soiled overalls, and the apparition appeared at night and at least once in broad daylight.

Eventually the family could stand it no longer and preferred to leave the house and live in tents. Fearing ridicule, the Caleys kept secret about the matter. But quite recently "it" terrified Jim, aged ten, whilst his parents were visiting forty miles away, and on their return the boy was so hysterical that his parents rung from the local post office and told the Parkes police all about their trouble. Two policemen who were sent out made a very thorough investigation, but nothing at all suspicious was found.

Mrs Caley's mother-in-law first saw the ghost whilst looking after the house during an absence of the family. She saw an elderly man in old clothes and a dirty hat, standing at the window. The mother-in-law was so upset she rung and demanded Mrs Caley's return at once. The ghost was seen on several occasions by different members of the family, and sometimes their visiting friends. On at least one occasion the domestic animals also saw the ghost, and the fur on the cat's back rose on end.

Mrs Caley explained her most trying experience with the ghost was when she saw this man sitting on the dressing table near her bed. "I was lying there with the lights out and the door closed. I leaned over to pick up cigarettes and matches and there it was. My hand seemed to go straight through it (the ghost). I started to scream and panic."

The first daylight sighting was made by her son Jim, and it was the last. It was then that the family decided to abandon the house for the tents. Incidentally, popular opinion of the township seemed to be against the idea of the cottage being haunted.
Newcastle Waters and Th'overland were soon left behind, and the Mates, now full-blown ringers, realised they were coming on to the Barkly Tableland proper, with the "forty mile" plain to negotiate for a start.

"Officially", the Barkly Tableland is approximately three hundred and fifty miles east and west, and two hundred miles north and south, and comprises some seventy thousand square miles of country. By far the greater proportion is fairly level plains to gently rolling downs, and most of it is very sparsely timbered. This area is grassed with the famous Mitchell and Flinders, and now that fair supplies of sub-artesian water have been made available, is amongst the finest grazing country in the world; and there is no doubt of its woolgrowing potentials and that in due course millions of merino sheep will displace the hundreds of thousands of cattle.

The Tableland extends from its north-west corner at 133 degrees east longitude and seventeen degrees south latitude, straight east to its north-easterly corner at 138 degrees east longitude and seventeen degrees south latitude, and southerly to the south-west corner at 133 degrees east longitude and twenty degrees south latitude, and the south-east corner at 138 degrees east longitude and twenty degrees south latitude.

The western end of the northern boundary (the north-west corner) is situated some thirty odd miles north-westerly from Newcastle Waters, a few miles in somewhat the same direction out past the Bucket Waterhole. An official "Department of the Interior, Canberra" pastoral map "compiled in 1953", defines the north-west corner placed in unoccupied country which extends for hundreds of miles to the west, north-west and south-west. About thirty miles easterly this northern boundary cuts through Dunmara and Beetaloo stations, thence about fifty miles of
unoccupied country, and thence through the southern portion of McArthur River station (with Malla Punyah station incidentally, a little to the south); thence about one hundred and fifty miles through unoccupied country crossing many "Gulf Country" rivers, and finally slices through Wollogorang station, to the Queensland-Northern Territory border.

The eastern boundary runs entirely along the Northern Territory-Queensland border. Starting from the north-east corner approximately in the centre of Wollogorang station's eastern boundary, it next cuts through Turn Off Lagoon station (a large area of which is in Queensland). Thence along some twenty miles of the famous Alexandria station's extreme north-east boundary, then slicing through Highland Plains station, and again along Alexandria's eastern boundary for about fifty miles, and finally cutting into Rocklands station to the south-east corner. The southern boundary followed through from the south-east corner on Rocklands next cuts Avon Downs station just about in half, then through a southern portion of Alexandria, a few miles north of that station's most southerly "outpost", Soudan outstation. The boundary then passes through some two hundred and forty miles of unoccupied semi-desert, crossing the Stuart Highway roughly approximately halfway between Tennant Creek township to the north, and the northern boundary of McLaren Creek station. This south-west corner is well out in unoccupied semi-desert country, and the same lies to the westward for many hundreds of miles.

The western boundary, from the north-west corner at a point some miles roughly approximately north-west of the Bucket waterhole (near the eastern end of the Murranji Track), runs its full length of two hundred miles entirely through unoccupied semi-desert country, its south-west corner being well and truly out in same, and no "civilisation" of any kind in a line straight west for over two hundred miles, where the small
mining settlement of Tanami is situated. And to the north-west and south-west of this south-west corner are vast areas of unoccupied semi- and worse desert. So that although there are immense stretches of excellent grazing country on the "official" Tableland, there is plenty of worthless stuff on the southern and western boundaries.

There is comparatively little surface water on the Barkly Tablelands, and before the advent of sub-artesian bores about 1920, graziers were very much handicapped thereby. As a result of this surface water scarcity, Aboriginals and native fauna have not been so numerous, although the latter converge in great numbers in a good season, and the blacks follow up the good hunting. It is probable that lack of surface water also adversely influences the sparsity of scrub and larger trees over this country. The soil is a heavy black loam which, before the advent of good roads and indeed even today in the usual enough absence of same, renders travelling impossible in the wet season, approximately November to February-March. However, the Flinders and Mitchell grasses fairly "bolt" in any sort of season, and the latter is exceedingly drought resistant. Although the official area of the Tableland is some sixty to seventy thousand square miles, perhaps only half this area would be actual open downs, and referred to by the locals as the Tablelands. Very few of them would have any idea of the official area. Explorer W. Landsborough is credited with being the discoverer of the Barkly Tablelands in the sixties, naming them for an admired acquaintance.

Nat "Bluey" Buchanan and his old time associate Sam Croker (of whom

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5There were a few sub-artesian bores on the Barkly in the eighteen nineties, and from 1902-03 there was a spate of boring. See Duncan, The Northern Territory Pastoral Industry, 1863-1910, pp.78-79.
much has been written in these pages) were the first landseekers (apart from explorers) to cross the Tableland (from east to west) in 1877 (the old "Coast Road" hugging the Gulf to the north had previously been used), finding the bodies of the two Prout brothers, probably guided by the blacks, who had perished of thirst the previous year, 1876, whilst attempting the same crossing. They were the first known white men to have perished on the Barkly and there were to be many more in the next two or three decades. In the "earlies", there were a few killings of the whites by the blacks, but nothing in comparison, sad to admit, to the same killings in reverse.

After leaving Th'overland and Newcastle Waters (as already mentioned), the "Forty Mile Plain" (practically treeless) was debouched on by Herb Cuthert's mob and ringers, including the Mates Long Jonsey and Young Bill. In dry years this stretch was included in what was loosely referred to as the "hundred mile dry". After a few days' travelling, Eva Downs homestead was in view for a day or so over toward the southern horizon, set amidst vast open downs and plains. The Eva was supposed to have been deserted for some time in consequence of earlier dry years, but some cattle were discerned away to the south, and at daybreak smoke was noticed rising from the homestead chimney. Later the boss rode over and found an elderly man in charge of the property and stock. Officially the stock-route ran much closer to the homestead, but Boss Herb seemed to be taking short cuts, and there was nobody to say him nay. The Eva changed hands several times: excellent country, but no surface water (sub-artesian had not then been exploited). "Bulwaddie" Bates was one of the first owners, but [was] eventually forced out through lack of water. Once sub-artesian water became available, the Eva became a very valuable property.

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6See Buchanan, Packhorse and Waterhole, pp.36-37.
At this homestead was the famous "Fizzer's Well" of We Of The Never Never. Through the prolonged drought of 1902-05 (perhaps the worst ever since the coming of the white man) the Fizzer lived up to his reputation of delivering the mails on time, between Powell's Creek on Th'overland to Anthony's Lagoons well out on the Tablelands. The dry stages ranged anything from fifty to one hundred miles, and the Eva was situated amongst this environment. The well was a deep one, and the windlass, bucket etc. was quite inadequate for the purpose, but the Fizzer battled on. The homestead and run had been temporarily deserted. The Fizzer's predecessor on the mail run, F.A. Stible, with companion white man Heir and a black gin, had perished well out on the Downs by the terrible death of thirst. Incidentally, the bodies were found by the famous cattle duffer Harry Redford (the Captain Starlight of Rolf Boldrewood's Robbery Under Arms). Ironically, as often enough occurs in such cases, the victims were within a few miles of good water. Redford also found other bodies perished of thirst during that terrible drought, when cattle, horses and 'roos died by the thousands round the waterholes, and even the weakest of the blacks "faded away" and died; so quoted the Old-timers.

The Fizzer eventually became scared (and no wonder!) of perishing on the Downs himself, and after an experience of losing his horses and literally crawling to water and so saving his life, he resigned from his job as mailman. Ironically enough once more, a few years later, 1911, he perished through too much water, being drowned in the Victoria River under heroic circumstances as already related.

And so on to Anthony's Lagoons, the kul-kul-qumdja (twin waters) of the blacks. Incidentally, Norman D. Tindale's Map on Aboriginal Tribes, 1940, depicts the Lagoons somewhat centrally placed amidst the junction of three tribes, the Kotandji, Kunindiri, and the Wambaia along the
south; and Eva Downs is also shown in the latter tribe's country. In 1914, all this area to away east of the Lagoons was supposed by the Old-timers to have been occupied by the "Wombas", but the Aborigines themselves were even then conspicuous by their absence. Probably the pioneer settlers had overdone the job of protecting life and property from the marauding tribesman, who had been "cleaned up" too severely.
"Old Bert the Taleteller", to give him his full title in the vernacular, was perhaps the oldest of the old-timers amongst Boss Herb's ringers during the trip of the Mates' sojourn. Old Bert could tell a good story, and he enjoyed the pastime. A few of his tales went back a decade or so earlier than the other old-timers, which put them at a disadvantage in arguing out all the facts of Bert's stories. All the same, when Young Bill caught up with checking up on some of them half a century later per the Sydney Mitchell Library, Old Bert was a long way out with some of his facts, confirming once more that bygone happenings on the ever advancing pioneering front during the first decades very soon became twisted and distorted, and depicted certain happenings far removed from a truthful account.

Back in 1883, about eleven years following the opening of the Overland Telegraph between Palmerston (now Darwin) and Adelaide, the area of the part of the Territory we are about to write of was experiencing a severe enough drought (to say nothing of the rest of the state [territory]) and was situated roughly around the central-western end of the Barkly Tableland, in semi-desert country east of the Overland Telegraph, where the stations Banka Banka, Brunchilly, Rockhampton Downs and Helen Springs in particular were later taken up. The expedition travelled mostly over the country that later became Helen Springs. During August
of that year, 1883, two teamsters Joe Martin and Jack Rees were travelling south along the Overland Telegraph track between Newcastle Waters and Powell's Creek Telegraph Station. They camped down for the night at a place called Lawson Springs. During the night one of the carriers, Martin, was murdered by a party of seven blacks, five of whom had followed them from Newcastle Waters, and two joining up at the fatal camp. The other carrier, Jack Rees, hearing suspicious sounds coming from his mate's camp some twenty-five yards off, and one of his own boys calling out, "What for black feller kill white feller," sprung from his bunk and grabbing his revolver, rushed in the direction of Martin's camp firing to frighten the blacks, but he was too late. Martin lay on the ground murdered, and his assailants were bolting into the desert. However, Rees had witnessed a native throw a heavy blazing fire-stick at Martin's body, and presumed he had killed the victim with it. Apparently there had previously been no show at all of hostility between whites and blacks up to the teamsters turning in, and friendly relations appeared to prevail.

Rees sent one of his boys (apparently he had been accompanied by more than one permanent and faithful boy, other than the seven blacks already mentioned) on south to Powell's Creek to explain the murder to the authorities there (probably he just carried a paper "yabber yabber" in a cleft stick).

It was not until about two months later, 29 October, that Mounted Constable Shirly who was in charge of the Barrow Creek Police Station (well south of Powell's Creek) was placed in charge of a punitive expedition which had gathered in the vicinity of Powell's Creek. Under Constable Shirly were six white men and two Aborigines. The party included the murdered teamster's mate Jack Rees, who insisted on going along. Poor Rees! Unwritten law compelled him to avenge his mate's
death. How little he suspected he was shortly to succumb to a more
terrible one. Described as experienced bushmen, the remainder of the
party comprised the two brothers, George and Arthur Phillips, and one
A.M. Giles who because of his stamina and native ability, later became
the leader of the party after poor Shirly's collapse. Presumably the
two Aborigines would be expected to be most useful in tracking and
contacting other natives.

Besides their mounts, the posse had five packhorses. There were to be
only two survivors of this effort to maintain law and order, the white
man Giles and one of the boys. All the horses perished. The police had
learnt from half-myall tribesmen that the murderers were out in country
situated east of the Telegraph Line, south-east from Powell's Creek and
south-west from Anthony's Lagoon; a large enough area!

The party disappeared into the semi-desert on 29 October, and were
completely blacked out from any form of civilisation until November 13:
fifteen days. But no anxiety about this state of affairs was felt at
Police Headquarters, it had happened so often before (no telephones or
wireless those days, and no settlement whatever in the country they
travelled through). The Darwin Police Headquarters was therefore not a
little stunned to receive Giles' terrible message over the telegraph
from Attack Creek on the night of November 17.

Shirly hoped to locate water (that is a camp) out to the south-east of
Powell's, somewhere out in the country Attack Creek emptied into and
disappeared (remember Reader, practically nothing at all was known of
this country east of the Telegraph Line those days!). Unfortunately,
the two boys were strangers to this area, and although the Aborigines
are wonderful at sensing direction and water in their own hunting
grounds, they can be considerably handicapped in this regard in country
that is strange to them.
For a start the party travelled eastward for twenty-five miles, and this first stretch warned them of the difficulties they were up against. It was practically mid-summer of a prolonged severe drought, and in the sun the heat was actually up to one hundred and fifty degrees. Practically no shade, just a bare dreary half gibber plain with patches of sparse desert scrub, and hot winds blew consistently: no indications of water, except that which they had packed. They realised also they would have trouble with the packhorses, which were of poor quality (a characteristic of most of the horses supplied to the Northern Territory Police those days). Then more promising country was sighted to the north, a plain with a little more shade. A low range of hills was crossed, and [on] 30 October (two days out from Powell's) Rees found a native well surrounded with good enough feed, and other minor waterholes. This water they named Rees' Well, and it was to play a vital part in the salvation of the two survivors. Here the packhorse that had carried the water died, and the two remaining packs took over the extra loading. For over a fortnight on leaving the well, this water, "packed", was the only water the shortly diminishing party possessed to see them through, until the lone white man Giles (the two boys having been previously dispatched to the Rees' to bring back very badly needed water) eventually staggered back to the well and the one surviving boy.

The party recuperated at Rees' Well for three days, then set out north-east on 4 November, travelling thirty-five miles over a bare enough plain. The weather was still terrifically hot. On the following day, 5 November, they were heartened on coming on a fair amount of bluebush and coolabah, and followed up flights of waterfowl to the north for a few miles, but it only ended in the usual barren waterless country.
Camp was made in the late afternoon, and their general position was discussed. Although they had only been out from Powell's Creek seven days, their plight had already become serious on account of not being able to find further water, so very necessary under most environment, but under the prevailing terrible climatic conditions experienced water became all important, and little else mattered. Incidentally, nothing of any note had been "picked up" ref. their quarry, the Aborigine murderers, but the problem for the meantime was to save themselves from perishing. The water on hand was now only three gallons, for eight men and the horses. Constable Shirly (and he had to make the decision) decided to abandon the search.

Incidentally, during 5 November four horses died, perishing for the want of a drink. Some of the group (experienced bushmen) yielded under pressure of great thirst (a usual enough mistake under such circumstances) to drinking more or less of the horses' blood, thereby reducing their resistance to perishing of thirst. The following day, 6 November, all gear and rations that could be discarded was securely planted and as it had also been decided to travel by night (for obvious reasons, and probably there was a moon of some sort!), the party set out for Rees' Well about forty-five miles off, by retracing their outward journey. They took along one pack only, including very few (if any) rations, and all guns and rifles were left behind. There was now only one gallon of water left. The bitterness of failure, to say nothing of the prevailing harsh conditions, was taking its toll, and morale was at a low ebb; alas, only too soon to worsen. During that day's camp, it was realised to what extent the persistent hot winds had obliterated their tracks (must have been very pronounced one surmises, as the boys would surely have lived up to their reputation of being amongst the world's most clever trackers!!).
Shirly led the party south that evening of the sixth, meaning to cut their outward tracks, but much scrub was encountered that they had not previously traversed on their outward journey. In the following very early morning of the seventh (ninth out from Powell's), Giles was sure they had come too far south, and made it clear he would not follow Shirly further in that direction, as they had definitely overshot the track to Rees'. A heated enough argument occurred between the constable and Giles and the former, realising the remainder of the party considered Giles' contention the more correct, consented to march to the north-west. During the heat of the argument, Shirly had actually asked Giles if he thought he (Giles) should command the expedition.

After travelling north-west through scrub for about ten miles an extensive plain was encountered, and as the morning had advanced and it was distressingly hot, camp was made for the day in what shade the scrub afforded. That night of the seventh the party started off but could only maintain very slow travelling. In the very early morning of the eighth (and the tenth day out from Powell's), Hussey, Rees and Arthur Phillips collapsed from the want of rest, sleep and water (to say nothing of proper food), assuring the others they would catch up later. This was the beginning of the disintegration of the little band. The constable left the last of the water with them, three pints, and although this was the humane course to take, taking a realistic view of it later they realised it was a mistake. It could have sustained the three that kept going, Shirly, Giles and the other Phillips brother until they reached the well, when water could have been dispatched speedily as possible to the weaker men left behind, or those of them that still survived. During this march the remaining horses collapsed one by one, and of course became a dead loss (one hopes the desperate men were able to assure that the animals died quickly).
Shirly, George Phillips and Giles then continued on, and a little later in the morning picked up their outward tracks, and estimated the distance to Rees' Well was now only about fourteen miles. But even that distance proved a long way to the perishing men. The last of the horses, three of them, collapsed at this stage of the journey, and "were left to die". The desperate group were apparently too far gone to do anything but stagger toward water, and were fast becoming weaker. Even the hardy and determined Giles was now in a bad way.

Shirly sent the two boys ahead in the hope that they would and could return with water in time to save the white men, and instructed them to that effect. The boys had apparently come through the ordeal better preserved than the whites. Natural enough perhaps, seeing that they had lived amongst similar harsh conditions since way back in the Dreamtime. The remaining trio knew it was highly probable that this was their only chance of survival. The dwindling party now gradually separated and staggered on individually, Giles in the lead, the idea being, presumably, that if the strongest could reach water, the remainder might be saved.

On reaching Attack Creek telegraph station, Giles' brief sketch of the disaster makes it clear that he was more than a little hazy at times as to what actually happened between the break up of the advance party on the eighth, and his recuperation on reaching Rees' Well on the ninth, but following is the gist of his story. He was in the lead of the straggling party and decided to camp for the day in a patch of scrub. As usual, the day was distressingly hot. He slept and swooned until the late evening, then set out on the track again. After going a couple of miles and whilst resting, he heard a voice calling pretty close, and found Shirly lying under a bush. The constable informed Giles in a weak whisper, "This is the end of the journey, I can't go any further, I die
here, I can't walk." He then informed Giles that George Phillips was lying some three hundred yards off, and he thought he was dead. Then whilst they were still talking a faint cooee was heard, and Giles answered it. Who should crawl up but Hussey, the man who with Rees and Arthur Phillips had been left behind when they collapsed, and given the last of the water. Hussey said his two companions were lying dead somewhere back along the track. Giles and Hussey now got Shirly on his feet for a start forward but he collapsed saying, "Good luck, off you go without me, I still have my revolver." And so Giles and Hussey could only leave him there. (One wonders whether the other perishing and acutely suffering men were lucky enough to possess loaded small arms at the finish.)

Giles now thought the well was a good ten miles off and the two men staggered on, very slowly. This was the night of 8 and 9 of November. At sunrise they could see the scrub adjacent to the well, and about two miles ahead. During the next few hundred yards and after several attempts to keep going amidst exhortations from Giles, Hussey finally collapsed for the last time. He was completely delirious, waving Giles away and clawing in the ground for imaginary water.

Giles managed to keep going and reached the scrub, he thought at about eight a.m. But he was still six miles from the well and was now suffering terribly from thirst and very weak (and it's pretty safe to assume he had eaten practically nothing for two or three days), but he struggled on for another couple more miles, then collapsed altogether. He was later roused by one of the black boys (the second boy was "not seen again" and presumed perished) pouring water over his head. The boy helped (half carried) Giles to within a couple of miles of the well and left him to fetch more water. Then with the help of the boy, again, eventually reached the well: 9 November and the eleventh day out from Powell's Creek.
Giles recuperated at the well for a few hours, then with the boy and full waterbags set out about one a.m. on the following morning, 12 November, in an endeavour to reach Hussey and any of the other stragglers remaining alive. In their weakened condition they were unable to continue after covering about four miles, and they still had to get back to the well. They cooed for a while, but receiving no answer, returned to Rees'.

Apparently the two survivors soon revived at the well, for they set out almost immediately for Attack Creek telegraph station, and arrived there on Tuesday morning, 13 November. Perhaps Giles thought that without proper food (and they must have lived on lizards etc. secured by the boy), they could only too soon become weaker by delaying the journey back to civilisation, and perhaps not be able to make it at all. It was really only a short journey back, although a nasty one, but in their condition and frame of mind it would seem much longer and arduous. Incidentally, it seems to have taken a long time for Police Headquarters at Darwin (Palmerston, those days!) under Inspector Paul Foelsche, to receive a report from Giles over the telegraph from Attack Creek.

Giles arrived at the Creek at nine a.m. Tuesday the thirteenth, and the Darwin police did not receive the tragic news until the night of Saturday the seventeenth, a lapse of some four and a half days!? Apparently the Overland Telegraph had their difficulties those days and didn't function nearly as smoothly as in later decades. Giles was brief enough at times in his description of certain happenings that occurred during this expedition, and hasn't handed on much information for posterity, and he was the only survivor capable of doing so! He may have decided, the way matters went, that less said the better, or it may have been just his laconical nature. But he did give a succinct explanation as to how he happened to be the lone white survivor. He
thought the main reason was that he had resisted the temptation under stress of cruel thirst, to drink the perishing horses' blood, knowing that it contained a high saline content. It would be interesting to know just how many of the party did resist the temptation.

It is so easy to practise the art of "armchair critic", but here we go again. One cannot peruse these old records without suspecting that Mounted Constable Shirly, although a conscientious police officer who perished bravely in the execution of his duty, was not talented enough in the leadership of rough and ready bushmen nor sufficiently gifted with the necessary art of bushcraft to lead such an expedition. One is inclined to the conclusion that a man like A.M. Giles (the lone white survivor) would have had a much better chance of getting the party through. Such a one may have had the ruthlessness, native leadership and bushcraft, to insist that the little water they possessed when the shortage became grim, would have gone to sustain the toughest and most determined to reach the precious liquid, and there by save the weakest, or at least some of them. Then, it is also apparent that at least Giles realised long before the mistaken constable, that they had failed to cut their outward track when returning to Rees' Well, and should immediately retrace their "overshoot". With the three pints of water and something like a day's (or rather a night's) march saved Giles and Shirly at least could have made the well and returned to the weaker and perishing men with water. How easy to be wise after the event! The Aboriginal survivor seems to have done well, and he undoubtedly saved Giles' life. One wonders what recognition, if any, was bestowed on him.

Other than the tragic outcome of the expedition, it must have been bitter irony for the Territory "battlers" to have to "swallow" the fact on that occasion, that crime (and murder at that) paid off for the near myall Aboriginal perpetrators. How the "munjongs" must have laughed
over the tragic failure of the "peer-leece" to punish them. But no doubt the police caught up with the failure in due course. One bright spot of the outcome of the expedition is that Mounted Constable Shirly was the only Northern Territory policeman ever to perish of thirst.1

This is an off-the-record story of peculiar and even ironically humorous hangings of blacks, quickly followed by a massacre of most of them, by whites, when the latter woke up to the grim joke being practised on them and bolted for the nearby river and escape, but for very few.

Old Bert swore it happened all right, a mate of a mate of his was actually present at the "fun". Practically all the droving ringer company had heard something of the affair, and two or three knew all about it by hearsay. The writer was unable to find any official records anent this tale, but there are some unofficial references to the occurrence, notably by the popular writer on pastoral Australiana the late Harry G. Lamond (who incidentally was the first white child to be born at Camooweal), who was most conversant with matters appertaining to the Barkly Tablelands and vast areas of Western Queensland. With the late Mr Lamond's manager's kind permission, many references will be drawn from his knowledge of relative events.

The country that this story relates to, is approximately one hundred and fifty miles southerly (as the crow flies) from Camooweal and a little less from the adjacent official south-eastern corner of the Barkly Tablelands, and about fifty miles inside the Queensland border from the Territory.

1No source has been found for this story.
The Aboriginals who actually inhabited these hunting grounds were the Maule tribe, and their borders were well hemmed in by no less than five other tribes including the fierce Kalkadunga to the north-east, a noted warlike tribe that fought and lost a determined defensive battle against a force of Queensland white officered Black Police, on Battle Hill in the Cloncurry district, north-west Queensland, back in the eighties (still called Battle Hill, adjacent to Granada station on the Dugald River). Anyone interested enough will read a lot about the Kalkadungas in Hudson Fysh's *Taming The North*. As the Maule were direct neighbours of the fierce and large physiqued Kalkadungas, we may form some idea of the nature of the Maule tribe. Hereabouts in the Georgina River is the seventeen mile long permanent waterhole called "Waukaba". A peculiarity of this water is that during dry spells and under some mysterious underground pressure the water-level actually rises, even to overflowing. Another peculiarity is that the water becomes much clearer and similar to ocean water in colour. It also becomes harder and brackish through release of certain chemicals from underwater springs, a not uncommon occurrence with some other famous Queensland waterholes. These waters are most unpalatable to casual partakers, but of quite normal taste to permanent users.

The waterhole even today is part of the boundary between Walgra station on the west bank, and Carondotta station on the east side. This country was first stocked, cattle of course, in the late eighteen sixties or early seventies, before the great Carondotta Pastoral Company was formed in 1879. In the very beginning of settlement on this country

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2 Hudson Fysh, *Taming The North*. The Story of Alexander Kennedy and other Queensland Pathfinders, (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1933). The Maule tribe appears on Tindale's 1940 map, but the Waluwara tribe is shown to occupy the same country on the 1974 map.
two huge areas were taken up, each spreading out on either side of the Georgina River: Headingly station to the north, and Roxborough Downs to the south. Our grim story could have occurred on one of either of those two stations, on an area that became known as, if not already named, Walgra. A large area on an official Queensland "Land Tenure" map, compiled 1958, shows that run as still a large area today, with its head station on the east side of the river, not far out. It could probably be fairly adjacent to the scene of the massacre.  

As usual it didn't take the blacks long to appreciate the taste of beef, and their wasteful and cruel depredations amongst the herds resulted in severe losses: the usual state of affairs all over Australia, in turn, as settlement expanded further and further out. On the west bank at the northerly end of the waterhole (which remember, was one and the same as the Georgina River) was a bare plain, and here the early settlers one day (late eighteen sixties or early seventies) enticed or forcefully mustered a large enough mob of blacks, or perhaps they were already camped there. The whites were mounted and armed, but as that would then be the custom, the blacks would not be alarmed in consequence.

Apparently the whites had tried to explain to the Aborigines as to how they should behave toward the white invaders of their country. That was, in effect, to eventually hand over their good hunting grounds and waters, and clear out to the unwanted barren hills and near deserts; but the blacks were not then prepared to "play ball" that way. What the whites wanted for a start was that their cattle should be left in peace.

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\text{In accordance with current maps, "Wolga" has been changed to "Walgra", "Carrandotta" to "Carandotta", and "Roxburg" to "Roxborough".}
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and not continually stampeded and numbers wantonly and cruelly destroyed
for the sake of the comparatively very small quantity of beef required.
But the blacks could not or would not understand, and carried on with
their depredations. On the plain mentioned (we will call it Massacre
Plain) was an outstanding coolabah tree not far from the river bank, and
it had a suitable limb at the right height. The tree became known as
"The Execution Tree", and other suggestive names. Presumably the idea
was to demonstrate to the blacks what would happen to them if they
persisted in cattle spearing etc., and it would be nice to presume they
experimented on the most guilty.

However, a boy was persuaded or made to climb the coolabah with a
block and hang it to the limb mentioned. A suitable rope was already in
place through the block. Amidst tremendous interest a hangman's noose
was then adjusted at one end of the rope, and the blacks being warmed up
to the "game", there was no difficulty in securing the noose around a
"volunteer's" neck, and the victim was hoisted up. Probably the
victim's intrigued and willing mates were instructed ref. the hauling,
maybe helped by any of the whites who enjoyed same.

Then the "fun" was on properly, the victim dancing and arm-flaying in
death agonies to no end. The blacks fairly roared with laughter, they
had never before seen anything half so funny. They laughed and laughed
until the victim was unable to entertain them any longer, hanging limp
in death. This phase of high merriment amongst the blacks at hangings
of their own kind were common enough, some of the victim's mates showing
much disappointment at not being accepted as a follow-on entertainer.
We are speaking of official hangings at present. It was eventually
realised by the authorities in most cases that the fun caused by such a
hanging was actually defeating justice, the blacks assuming that further
crime and hangings would mean more entertaining fun.
And so there was no time lost in securing a second eager volunteer to keep the entertainment going, the black company not realising that the previous victim had not merely fainted, but had been "killem'd dead". It is not recorded how many volunteered to keep the fun going, probably very few, before it was realised that the "dancer" was performing his last entertainment, and now even the tribe's simpletons could not be kidded into volunteering. The show was over.

It does not seem clear as to what actually started the blacks stampeding. Perhaps the whites tried to impress another victim, or the now thoroughly scared Aborigines may have passed the word by sign language most likely, or even orally, to bolt at a given signal, but suddenly they broke and "rushed" for the river. The mounted whites tried unsuccessfully to head them off, and then started firing at the swimming blacks as they struck out for the opposite bank. The swimmers would of course use to the full their noted ability to swim under water, only emerging long enough to take another breath. Nevertheless, the slaughter was heavy to very heavy according to most reports, the water becoming stained red in many places. In those early days there would still be a preponderance of muzzle-loading firearms, perhaps no rifles at all, and this would be considerably in favour of some of the blacks escaping.

However, Mr Lamond tells an interesting story of meeting two of the survivors some few decades later, working on Walgra station - Fanny and Willie - two simple old Aborigines, and they related the story in poor enough pidgin of the early massacre, substantiating (for what it was worth) our account as related. Fanny was spared on account of her tender age, and Willie by surviving the swim in the waterhole until he could take refuge amongst a bed of floating waterlilies on the far side of the river, where he lay "doggo" under the broad leaves using all the
wiles of a myall blackfellow to evade detection until nightfall, and with it escape.

Mr Lamond questioned separately and very closely these two old people, and as a man of considerable experience amongst station blacks, was convinced they were speaking the truth. Apparently the local blacks had always referred back to the massacre as "the time the river ran red with blood". Mr Lamond continues: "I rode over that ground many times (Massacre Plain). Once I dismounted and picked up the barrel of an old muzzle-loader. That barrel was bent. I let my imagination go. I pictured a white man and a black wrestling. The white had fired his musket, he had no chance to reload. He hit the black over the head with the barrel, thus bending it, and no record is given of who won the fight."

Lamond goes on to explain that during his management, he instructed a boy to climb the execution tree and secure what was left of the old block still hanging there. He then sent the block along with its history to an old friend of his (his "Old Boss") the late Mr C.J. Brabazon of Elderslie station near Winton, Queensland. Mr Brabazon "had a remarkable collection of Aboriginal curios". The block was "lost" when Mr Brabazon "left Elderslie". "It is probably still lost."

Well! The block was probably stolen by an unscrupulous collector, or because it reminded the thief (to phrase the act at its worst) of a somewhat similar occurrence he took a part in. Perhaps he had a hand in the very massacre in question. And of course, many folk are convinced it is for the best that such curios that remind us of "man's inhumanity

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to man" should be destroyed if possible, whenever found. Perhaps there is something in the contention!

Crossing east to west (or vice versa) at the western end of the Barkly Tablelands, small to larger patches of "desert" country are occasionally negotiated, this state of affairs being more generally emphasised toward the southern boundary, much of which definitely becomes semi-desert. Stunted timber grows on these patches, or north and south running strips, including bloodwood, snappy gum, malleys etc. and much mongrel scrub. Snakes, and death adders in particular, are fairly plentiful in these semi-desert patches, and it was a general belief that where bluebush scrub thrived as it often appeared to in these scrubs, it was "watch your step for death adders". Strangely enough (or was it?), Herb Cuthbert's ringers experienced no exception to the rule on this particular trip, several of the dangerous doggo lying brutes being destroyed. What made them so dangerous was that, as explained, they wouldn't get out of anyone's way, but lay doggo until trodden on. As usual during such experiences many were the tales told re adders, including the oft repeated one of awaking in daylight on these tablelands after occupying a camp taken up in the dark the previous evening, to be startled "no end" at the sight of one of the wicked looking reptiles which had been lying doggo all night, only inches from the sleeper's head, and no doubt the like experience actually happened, occasionally.

But the best story of the lot was put over, and convincingly enough, by "Old Bert the Taleteller". As usual, a couple of the old-timers had heard more or less about it, but Bert had it over them (again as usual!), having "got the facts straight from a mate, who knew a bloke who had been mates with a reliable man of integrity who was actually on the expedition" (etc., etc.) where one of the "bosses" went through the
extremely trying experience of having a death adder crawl over his face, whilst he himself was compelled to practise the loathsome thing's own game of lying doggo until the danger of almost certainly being bitten had passed.

The story written by the man himself is preserved for all time in the Sydney Mitchell Library. The writer of these lines spent a fascinating few minutes over it some time back when searching for other data, but was foolish enough to make a mental note only of the particular book or pamphlet (whatever it was) for future reference. Now, the writer just cannot remember the book reference or name of the particular prospector or explorer. However, the writer hopes to catch up with the substantiating information in due course, and suitably include same in this manuscript.

The relater's account of his terrifying experience went something like the following. It happened in "desert" country in Western Australia during the eighties. A party were camped for the day, the weather very hot and little or no shade about. Our man lay down for a rest on the ground inside his small tent, and dozed. He was soon awakened, and he realised later his first thought was that something was wrong. He had apparently disturbed his body a little in waking, and lying on his back, was suddenly frozen into nightmareish horror on observing a thoroughly on-guard death adder, a large one, in position on his chest, and poised to strike at his face. He had apparently alarmed the adder in waking, and the latter had probably observed his face working and prepared to strike at the apparent danger.

As already remarked, the victim was instantly frozen into a paralysis of fright (the writer can appreciate our man's sensations having experienced the same more than once during certain grim war situations).
After a few seconds (that would seem like minutes), our victim realised that under the circumstances his best chance of escaping being bitten by the deadly creature was to lie perfectly still in the hope that the horrible thing would eventually move off. In any case, he felt he was paralysed with such a terror, that he doubted his ability to make a sudden escape move, and if he fumbled he would surely be bitten and die a terrible death. So he continued to lie doggo, hardly daring to breath.

After a while the adder relaxed and slid down to the ground and made as if it intended an exit under the raised side of the tent, but horror of horrors, after pausing for a while it turned back on its tracks toward the doggo victim who was now lying in a helpless stupor, a waking nightmare that compelled him to remain absolutely immovable. Worse followed. The loathsome thing actually slowly crawled over his face and slid to the ground on the opposite side, and eventually under the raised tent side wall (close to where it had entered). The victim lay for a long time, he thought, in the horrible half trance nightmare, before he could compel himself to look round and feel satisfied the danger and horrible ordeal was over. He felt weak and ill. But after a while he called his resting companions and shakily and haltingly told his story. He had some difficulty in convincing himself it was other than a bad nightmare. The party were of course all more or less bushmen of experience, and they knew their mate was relating positive facts.

A careful and thorough search was made of the sandy ground in and around the tent: the proof was definitely and plainly there. The adder had apparently been travelling on a set course: there was its track out of the scrub straight to and under the raised side of the tent. Coming up against a "log" (the sleeping victim), the creature was in the act of passing over the obstacle when our man woke up, causing the reptile to
become aware of danger and setting itself on guard against the victim's moving face. There was no mistaking the adder tracks. When it slid to the ground from the victim's body the first time, it apparently intended to continue with its original set course, but for some reason known only to itself, it changed its mind (allowing they have one) and doubled back on its tracks and actually slid over the stunned man's face on its way out the side of the tent where it had entered, and back to the scrub. An intensive search was made for the adder, but its luck held: it was not found.

Well! To read the victim's narrative was to be convinced of the truth of same. Further, he was apparently a man of character and integrity. Just a simple straightforward account of a terrifying experience. And when Old Bert told the tale to his experienced ringer mates, most of whom already knew something about it, not one but wasn't convinced of its truth, but then "truth is stranger than fiction", to be sure!

One magnificent starry night, Young Bill was doing a trick with Old Bert the Taleteller. The mob were behaving restful enough, mostly lying down and chewing the cud. Bill played his mouth organ and sang softly from his repertoire of popular songs, including a little ragtime (the very latest craze direct from the big smokes down south). Bill thought he was the first to introduce ragtime to the far north-west. He had picked it up just before leaving western Queensland, from a droll, easygoing sort of fellow popularly known as "Alge", just returned from a prolonged holiday in the big smoke, Sydney. The favourite hit "Old Bill" well remembers, was "Ragtime Cowboy Joe".

After a while the ringers conversed in quiet tones, Young Bill expressing much appreciation of Bert's story of the Walgra station "Execution Tree" hangings, which Bert had shortly related to the
company. Bert took his cue: he knew he had "roped in" a good and genuinely interested listener, and settled himself to unwind the long tale of the trouble between the myall munjongs (wild blacks) and McArthur River station, back in the "earlies" (eighteen eighties). Bert's account of these happenings was a good one, and brought to light much matter that never became official knowledge, but then, some of it was apt to be much exaggerated too, in being orally passed down over the years.

McArthur River station was taken up in the eighties of last century and was an enormous area, some twenty-two thousand square miles. It was then claimed to be, and probably was, the biggest cattle run in the world. The owners were Amos Brothers and Broad (whoever they were), but they certainly took on a tough proposition. The run grazed some twenty thousand head of cattle, more or less, and it was then reckoned a good thousand a year were speared by the blacks.

Anthropologist N.B. Tindale's "Map of the Distribution of Australian Aboriginal Tribes", published 1940, depicts the following along the McArthur River, from its northern estuary to its source under the Barkly "upjump" [sic] respectively: the Janjula, the Binbinga, the Kotandji, and the Wambaia; and other tribes are shown as close enough neighbours to be involved. The Wambaia extended well south over the Barkly Tableland. However, the Old Hands generally referred to all the blacks occupying the McArthur River country (once clear of Borroloola) as the "Wambas" or "Wombose", although they admitted their country (The Wambaia's) was also much over-run by neighbouring tribes.

The head station (for what it was worth) was made on the west bank of the McArthur River, about forty miles south of the township of Borroloola (Aborigine meaning Tie, or paperbark trees) which in turn was
some forty odd miles from the river mouth, just past Carrington Landing. All the big station's supplies of all kinds to keep going at all, were unshipped at Carrington Landing or Borroloola (depending on the size of the vessel), thence conveyed per horse-drawn wagon to the station. To the south of the homestead the run extended well on to the Barkly Tableland, well over a hundred miles off, per the track. The head station was upward of two hundred miles from where the township of Anthony's Lagoon on the Barkly later sprung up, on Creswell Creek. (These mileages are quoted as they were reckoned out there in 1914, over fifty years ago. On the whole distances were inclined to be exaggerated those days, and bush tracks would be straightened out somewhat in the interim. The mileages mentioned would, generally speaking, be less today.)

During the period under perusal, the eighties and nineties, that part of outback Queensland and the Northern Territory which was passing through the pioneering stages, was literally seething with disgust and indignation at the way the blacks were spearing and generally stampeding all stock, cruelly destroying thousands for the fun of it, yet consuming only a very small proportion as food. The blacks were also killing a small number of the settlers, including many Chinamen who they invariably ate.

Of course nobody became indignant those days (that is no whites) that the Aborigines were being robbed of their inheritance which they had owned and enjoyed in their own way for thousands of years, but we are speaking of the blacks' conduct toward the whites. The settlers were "forced" to adopt the principle of voluntarily hunting down the blacks per punitive "shooting up" expeditions, and black troopers under white officers were "officially" organised for the same purpose. That these means of "teaching the niggers a lesson" were often carried too far
altogether, such as killing (sometimes unnecessarily cruelly) men, women and children, the innocent with the guilty, is an exceedingly dark stain on the Nation's escutcheon.

Apparently a very fine man named Tom Lynott was manager of the station in the early 1880s. During a ride round for one purpose or another during 1889, manager Tom and his posse were in the "Red Range" country near Mount Crawford and some hundred miles more or less from home, where he followed some myall blacks after listening to a remarkable story from them, and met a very old white man who had been living with the blacks for many years. He was in a terrible state of health, suffering acutely from some disease (possibly venereal?) and could neither walk or ride, but was staggering between two lubras. He had an exceedingly long beard and was tattooed on breast and arms. Speaking in a language Tom Lynott thought to be German, he evinced extreme joy at meeting white men. The latter were greatly intrigued, the old fellow was undoubtedly a white man. There was no way of getting him back to the homestead, the ancient recluse had to be left with the blacks for the time being. Tom Lynott always believed that the old man was Classens, a brother-in-law of Doctor Leichhardt the lost explorer, who had been a sailor and was a member of the lost expedition in 1848.

Unfortunately the old man thought to be Classens was shortly after his "discovery" shot by mistake in the big "round up" carried out after Lynott's being relieved in the early nineties of his managership by a son of the owners, who acquired a head stockman named Jim Lenehan who was just the opposite to Lynott in his dealings with the blacks, dispensing with "kid glove" methods and relying one hundred per cent on bullets. Incidentally, Lenehan was killed by his dark skinned adversaries on Broadmere. At least up to recent years, a tree close adjacent to where he fell still bore his name.
Tom Lynott had the reputation that before resorting to a shooting war, he would ride the country along with a few others, all well armed of course, endeavouring to warn the blacks against their habit of destroying the whole herd for the sake of a little meat and a lot of sport. It seems fairly safe to assume we can credit Lynott with offering them a reasonable quantity of meat from the homestead on slaughtering days, or if same was not practical to all the clans (and for various reasons it hardly could be), then confine their sport to killing one beast only at a time, and refrain from continually frightening the herds. During these rides every precaution was taken against attack. Riding into ambush would be an acute danger, and sneak attack at piccaninny daylight another. Sentries were kept on guard always, but especially at night.

The whites, now thoroughly incensed, rode out to kill in deadly earnest. Lenehan's murder seems to have brought matters to a head. For hundreds of miles east and west of the McArthur River, the "niggers" were tracked down swiftly and relentlessly, and anything with a "dark skin" was ruthlessly shot down: there were no exceptions. Eventually, literally running before the pursuers, the strongest and toughest made for their sacred grounds and hide-out of Dungaminnie, a cul-de-sac of practically unclimbable cliffs, and no doubt they thought and hoped this place, "ulchingra" (sacred) in the extreme from way back in the Dreaming, would in some way protect them. There would be no women amongst them, the place was absolutely forbidden them. Dungaminnie was about a hundred miles north of Anthony's Lagoon, in the Red Range, and a few miles in to the east side of the track which later developed.

Young Bill and Long Jonsey rode past the hardly discernible turn-off on their way north from Anthony's to Borroloola in 1914. The Mates had heard all about the queer place and its sacrificial monolithic stone,
also of the "hundreds" of skeletons (so the vernacular ran those days), relics of the great massacre of a couple of decades earlier. But the Lads were in a hurry: they were scared in "bad nigger country". There was nothing but open to thick scrub and bush with an occasional open patch those days, from Barkly or Wallalla tumbledown (or "jump-up", depending whether one were up on the tableland, or down on the river country) to the McArthur River homestead, for about one hundred and thirty miles, and much of it bad ambush nigger country. The Mates were taking no chances and rode with their loaded rifles across the pommel. They also wore revolvers for good measure. It was considered sound policy to "show the flag" under such circumstances.

And so eventually the hunted Aborigines, what was left of them, hurried through the narrow neck into Dungaminnie. The whites were now hard behind them, and leaving a boy (popular and well liked, from the "Loo") to guard the narrow entrance to the "trap", they hurried on and started shooting. There was no escape for the blacks, although some were shot down after climbing well up the cliffs. Cliff Lynott, brother of Tom the former McArthur River station manager, is known to have declared years after the massacre that the hunters never bothered to count the dead until the Dungaminnie shooting, but there were twenty-two "Womba" dead on that occasion (or was it nearer fifty-two or one hundred and two!?). Incidentally, Cliff Lynott lies in a lonely pioneer grave of the Roper River country. There was only one casualty among the hunters at Dungaminnie, the half-caste boy "Jingle" left on guard at the entrance, who very soon died from receiving a spear wound in the chest. Before passing out, he spoke tenderly of his coloured girlfriend Katie, back at the "Loo". The bush poet Linklater composed a poem of very many verses anent Jingle's last words and sentiments toward his girl, and many a time the writer has heard it "crooned" to the herd through the
night, anything up to fifty verses (or so it would seem when compelled to listen to same, but Young Bill never actually counted them!!).

As regards Tom Lynott's contention that the old bearded and tattooed foreign speaking recluse was Classens of Dr Leichhardt's lost expedition, he could have been the very same. The expedition disappeared in 1848, so that Classens, if 'twas he, had been some forty-one years with the blacks, and it would be interesting to know his age at the time of the expedition's disappearance. At the time Tom Lynott found the old man in 1889, Leichhardt's expedition had disappeared some forty-one years previously, and there was then a very strong belief that the "huts" discovered on the Elsey River (of We of the Never-Never country) by explorer Gregory in his search for the lost explorers, were indeed relics of Leichhardt and his men. This contention lent weight to Tom Lynott's belief ref. the old man, as the huts mentioned were only some two hundred and fifty to three hundred miles from the Red Range country, where the old chap was found. Nevertheless, the writer, after perusing Dr Leichhardt's known movements and intentions after starting west from adjacent to where the town of Roma, Queensland, stands today, is convinced that the lost expedition met its fate many hundreds of miles further south than the Elsey River, and that his party perished amidst the Channel Country or the shifting sandhills of the Simpson Desert to the west of same.

The writer is inclined to the opinion that the old foreign sailor who spent so many years with the Aborigines was just another castaway on the not too distant shores of the Gulf of Carpentaria to the north. There have been not a few just such cases since the Dutch first appeared off the Australian mainland between Cape York and right round the northern, western and south-western coasts, since early in the seventeenth century. A few castaways and maroonings have been authenticated, and
one may be sure there were some of which there is no record. It was a pity Tom Lynott's "find" met his death without his story coming to light. It could have been very interesting, and of course he may have only resided with the blacks a much shorter period than the approximately forty years presumed. In any case this story could have made fascinating reading, but it is now very unlikely to even be solved.

When things had quietened down after the Dungaminnie climax, some Aboriginal women and two small boys were taken to the head station, and it was believed they were the last of the Wambaia tribe (it would seem the rest of the gins and piccaninies went the same way as their menfolk). Probably it was thought this remnant could be trained to be useful about the station. One of the boys, Jupiter, grew up to be a good stockman, and in time was considered to be the last survivor of his tribe, but it seems probable that at least odd members must have escaped and been absorbed into other tribes. But this as it may be, the Wambaia People as a tribe went the way of so many others before them, to make way for their white skinned "conquerors".

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5This account of incidents on McArthur River station is taken from Ernestine Hill's "Rugged Are The Ranges", Walkabout, Vol.12, No.3 (January 1946), pp.29-34.
Chapter 24

ON OVER THE QUEENSLAND BORDER TO CAMOOWEAL

Anthony's Lagoons (and it was generally pronounced in the plural) was the junction of the east-west stock-route and the track leading away north (about three hundred miles it was reckoned) to the gulf coast (Gulf of Carpentaria), after contacting and crossing the east-west gulf road township of Borroloola on the west bank of the McArthur River, some forty miles in from the sea.

Besides the Anthony's Lagoon cattle run, there was a police station and a store. The township incidentally, was well scattered. The two separate lagoons from which the township got its name, the Kul-kul-quadja of the blacks (meaning twin waters), was part of Creswell Creek, the name the locality was originally known by. A few unemployed "travellers" were camped about the place waiting to be picked up for droving, and a yarn with any stranger was always welcomed. The latest news including "mulga" wires was eagerly passed round.

However, a couple of days' travelling and Anthony's was left behind, but not quite. Came a day of sunshine alternating with overcast cloud, when on a couple of occasions was plainly discerned well up in the sky to the west in a photographic phenomenon of nature, the "township" of Anthony's itself, and it was remarkable how plainly the details stood out. This phenomenon was not so very unusual out on the open plains country, and many were the instances exchanged ref. same. Young Bill and Harry Jones had both witnessed same phenomenon in Queensland.
and Bill got back to the mob now disappearing over the horizon, after
two or three attempts.

The pain of neuralgia had been so severe that the victim got quite a
shock from the experience, and although the crisis of the attack was
over and the worst of the pain gradually diminished and did not recur,
Bill was frightened into mentally resolving that even if the tooth never
played up again, he would have it removed as soon as he reached
civilisation and a doctor. And that is exactly what he did on reaching
Darwin some months later.

Now came a red letter day, when both a motor car and a white woman
were observed, for a few minutes. Fortunately the newfangled machine
passed the mob well down wind, and other than snorting and shaking their
heads etc. the cattle were steady enough. At the time Young Bill was
riding and yarning with Camooweal Bill (who incidentally could always be
located at the "Weal" when not droving) when the latter suddenly
gesticulated toward a cloud of dust approaching from the east and
remarked, "What the bloody hell's this comin'?" and when it was clear a
motor car was approaching out of the dust, added, "Look out for the
cattle, anything can happen," meaning the mob would just as likely rush
in fright at seeing such a mechanical monster for the first time, and
every ringer was at once alert for such a contingency. In the event (as
already remarked), nothing happened. But would wonders never cease! As
the motor drew nearer it was realised beside the male driver (white of
course) was a white woman. This was news, something to talk about, and
directly it was passed round the mob from ringer to ringer that it was
Brunette Downs manager Joe Cotton and his wife, and it was surmised they
were "off to town", Palmerston (Port Darwin), some four hundred and
fifty miles off.
A day or so further on was pointed out away off to the right of the track a line of coolabah denoting a creek bed (a dry one, and even in mid-winter the line of timber was "dancing" in mirage), the place where a "numerous enough" group of Chinese, on their way walking from the Kimberley gold diggings to the Palmer fields in North Queensland, when the former diggings were petering out back in the late eighties, met with tragedy and disaster. The poor ignorant Coolies had tackled a dry track in summer, and when keenly suffering for the want of a drink had fallen for the mirage of shady timber around a lake away off the track, and on arriving at the imagined oasis found nothing but a dry creek. The poor wretches perished there to a man, all within a few square miles. Vernacular had it that the bones were still lying about "over there", and the remains had all originally been well more or less successfully searched for any gold they may have been carrying on them. Apparently it was their custom to generally be in possession of some when moving from place to place.

A day or two later Brunette Downs was passed away on the southern horizon, and of course the mob was being escorted by a representative stockman of that station, just to make sure any strays did not go to swell the mob so that it eventually passed over the exit boundary greater in numbers than when arriving. The practice of being escorted through the station by a representative of same was expected and tolerated by unwritten law, and as a matter of fact it was the law, but the former interpretation was traditional and popular, and anyway a stranger tagging along with the mob sometimes up to several days was always welcome: a new face and news of the outside world, for what it was worth! Boss Herb was heard to jocularly remark to the visitor as a few good conditioned Brunette cattle were prevented from joining the mob, "Wish you'd look the other way for a while, those hatchet brands
would look well amongst my lot." (A hatchet head was part of the Brunette brand.) The suggestion met with a hearty laugh by the recipient, who countered with, "Want a bloke to get ten years and hunted off the Barkly?" then added, "Well it would only be in keeping with the Brunette tradition, seeing that the world's champion cattle duffer had founded and run the station for a few years." More laughter, not all forced.

The escort was referring of course to the well-known fact that Harry Redford, the boss cattle duffer who back in the sixties lifted a thousand head from Bowen Downs (the sister station of Mount Cornish) in Western Queensland and overlanded them about fifteen hundred miles well down into South Australia, where he sold them. The overlanding of the mob was considered a magnificent feat of stock handling and bushmanship, although the season over the back country he travelled through (much of it "desert") did happen to be an exceptionally good one. The Brunette escort also reminded the ringers (what they already knew, mostly) that mobs were passing through every few days, and would be for some time, and in good seasons like the present up to twenty thousand head went through, all travelling easterly of course. The actual stock-route, in places, was beginning to show signs of being a little eaten out, but the mob were often miles off the actual route taking short cuts, if permitted by the representative station "guide". There was plenty of surface water about after the thunderstorms, and some of the creeks were running.

MacDonald, Smith and Macansh (whoever they were!) were the first owners of Brunette, and Harry Redford (or Readford, the Captain Starlight of Rolf Boldrewood's classic Robbery Under Arms) took the first cattle out and formed and managed the run for several years. He eventually managed McArthur River station, and a ringer that accompanied
him on his original trip out with the stocking up cattle, took over the Brunette managership. Redford was eventually drowned in the flooded Corella Creek (on the station) about 1911, and the blacks (as usual in such cases) found the body. He still sleeps there in a lonely grave, and it is pleasing to reflect that some years back a "big" and public-minded man in "flying" business had the sadly neglected grave thoroughly renovated. Harry Redford had apparently been a very popular (albeit not with the big squatters!) and a true and generous friend, the same sentiments being extended to down and out strangers.¹

Corella Lake was always part of Brunette, and back in the eighties whilst the station was being taken up, Police Officer F.C. Urquhart with his Aboriginal troopers was stationed on the lake. One day a rider arrived bearing complaints from manager-owner Hopkins of Granada station on the Dugald River, some forty odd miles north of where the large Queensland town of Cloncurry stands today. Anthropologist N. Tindale's "Aboriginal Map" depicts Cloncurry near the southern boundary of the Maithakari tribe, with the Wanamara and "fierce warlike" Kalkadungas in a close enough half circle running east and south-west. Hopkins' complaint (or information) concerned the troublesome Kalkadungas, and in this latest foray they had murdered a lone Chinaman shepherd out on the run, carrying the body off, but leaving behind untouched a couple of weeks' rations just acquired from the head station. The sheep were also unmolested. The Kalkadungas were tracked to their lair by the station people, and evidence was definitely apparent that the remains of the Chinaman had been cooked and eaten, "the bones having been picked clean". (Certain facts of this affair have already been mentioned in Ch. XXIII.)

Officer F.C. Urquhart and his black troopers set out in search of the murderers, accompanied by station owner Hopkins, and eventually tracked the quarry down in wild hilly country around the head of Prospector Creek. The blacks had taken up a strong position on a "mountain" that became, and is still known as, "Battle Mountain". Urquhart and his men stormed the hill and the blacks defended most bravely and determinedly. Urquhart was actually knocked out for a while when a huge lump of antbed (and the recipient was lucky it wasn't a "goolie" or a "gibber") struck him on the head with great force. However, directly as usual, rifles overcame spears and boomerangs, very few of the blacks escaping; and also as usual enough there were no fatal casualties amongst the attackers. The "battle" has been cited as one of the few instances where the Aborigines stood up determinedly to rifle fire and fought it out, but then the Kalkadungas were considered above the average in bravery and savagery.

The successful attackers passed by Battle Mountain on their return from following up the few survivors, and noted definitely that the women and children of the slain warriors had been living off the dead tribesmen's flesh, even though decomposition had set in. From the writer's acquired knowledge of the Aboriginals, they were all more or less cannibals. They assumed it was good policy to eat deceased members of the tribe or enemies slain in battle, so long as they were satisfied the "fare" had not died of an infectious disease. It was supposed that any good trait of courage and skill that the victim had possessed would be passed on to the diner, but one can't help forming the opinion that the supposition was often used as an excuse, and human flesh was often eaten mainly for the sensual pleasure derived therefrom. This indulgence also included unwanted infants. There are very few cases where the Aborigines actually slew anybody for the express purpose of
practising cannibalism.²

Next break in the monotony of staring over the everlasting almost level and practically treeless plains, was crossing the Brunette-Alexandria boundary. Not that there was anything there to denote same to strangers, but some of the ringers had been through this country several times and knew the boundary landmarks: a line with a near couple of big twin beefwoods and a sparse clump of coolabah away to the south. The Brunette guide had pulled out the previous day, and now all hands were expecting the Alexandria man to show up anytime. However, he was not picked up until the following day, as the big station just then hadn't any stock running up that end of the run.

Now there was much talk of the big annual Picnic Race Meeting that would be coming off later down Ranken River station way: the horses that had run in the past and those that were expected to enter for next meeting etc., etc.. Apparently there had been some great "ring-ins", including some outrageous affairs: champions from the big cities somewhat disguised, entered as just ordinary station hacks, cleaning up the field and the money. Folk would have their suspicions, but by the time the facts got around ref. the ring-ins' true record (and of course the tale lost nothing in the cycle of being passed down the grapevine), horse, owner and money were far away. But the likes of these goings-on happened every now and again at most bush meetings.

The cattle "rushed" the following day, the last of any consequence as far as the Mates followed them (to Camooweal), and likely enough...

²This account of Urquhart's expedition is taken from Fysh, Taming The North, pp.179-81.
Northern Territory Overlanders: "They would now be able to hold their own in any company: very few 'knockabout' young fellows could talk of crossing the Territory with cattle."
(The Pastoralists' Review, Vol.XX, 1910, p.274.)

Alexandria Downs: "... run by a handful of white men, and the smartest of the boys and gins from the nearby blacks' camp."
(Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Australia.)
...of this area may be imagined, when it is considered that it [Alexandria Downs] measures about one-eighth the area of Victoria, and is approximately one hundred and eighty miles in a straight line between the most southern and northern boundaries, and by a similar definition a little over a hundred miles east and west. It's a very eratically shaped boundary, the northern and southern being much elongated, as it were. Nearly the whole area is "flat as a board". It has for some years been claimed to be the world's largest cattle station, outdoing Victoria River Downs which has been subject to much cutting up. The Big Run (Alexandria Downs) at that time (1950), carried approximately seventy thousand cattle and nine hundred horses, which incidentally averaged out at about two and a half head of horses and cattle per square mile, and at that time there were already thirty sub-artesian bores on the property (a lone windmill could be occasionally discerned). Most of the bores averaged a depth of three hundred to three hundred and fifty feet, a few much deeper. The stock were grazed almost wholly on magnificent Mitchell and Flinders grasses.

At the time of Young Bill and Harry Jones' sojourn through this country, the station was run by a handful of white men, and the smartest of the boys and gins from the nearby blacks' camp on the Playford River.

Periodically a bit of outrageous duffing and brand faking was still carried on as late as 1943 on the Big Run (and no doubt comparatively minor activity in this regard is still practised today!). In the year mentioned Northern Territory police arrested one "Smiler" Smith who, with the assistance of a gin (mother of two piccaninnies) and apparently other blacks, was caught faking the station brand with bent fencing wire, out in the far north-east corner of the run, well off the open
tableland close to the Queensland border, in comparatively most rugged country. The police had quite a chase before arresting the known gun happy culprit, who was tried in Alice Springs (one of the charges being consorting with Aboriginal women), but for some reason or other got off light at six months.

And so across the adjoining station Avon Downs (and passing through a fence or two in these parts), on to Rocklands station. Then through the Northern Territory-Queensland border gate (the "Weal Gate") and a few miles to the Georgina River and Camooweal (still on Rocklands station).

Just half a century later Old Bill passed through this gate touring westward per motor bus on the great Barkly Highway. Bus and highway were not even dreamt of at the time of first passing through, but Bill could swear the same gateposts were doing a good job, though the old round bush timber gates had been replaced by a modern steel anti-stock-crossing grid.

Passing through Avon Downs shortly before entering Queensland from the Territory, the Lads had a reminder of the former state in finding themselves amongst sheep once more, and merinos at that. These Avon Downs sheep were spoken of as the only flock in the northern part of the Territory. Sheep had been tried much earlier but such ventures had all failed, the harsh conditions and coarse sour tropical grass and herbages of the wet to say nothing of the depredations of the blacks, proved too detrimental for the "woollies", and the few that survived the ordeal were eventually removed back to more suitable environment. But apparently some two or three thousand of the best of the Avon Downs

^See Introduction, Ch.2, p.24^
sheep that Young Bill and Long Jonsey saw on their jaunt were about to be tried out by the new Territory bosses, the Federal Government (who had recently, 1911, taken over from the Government of South Australia) at their proposed Experiment Station, Mataranka, situated southerly from the northern coast (as the crow flies) some two hundred miles and on the Stuart Highway. Incidentally, this project also failed badly, and there are no sheep at least of any consequence today west of Avon Downs. But it has been felt sure for a long time that woolgrowing will come into its own and thrive on the Barkly Tablelands when better roads and the advent of a railway open up those parts, "proper".

W. Landsborough discovered the Camooweal Waterhole in the upper Georgina River (the "White Lily Lagoon" of the Wakaja tribe) whilst searching for lost Burke and Wills about 1861. Landsborough had named his newly discovered river the Herbert, but it was later changed to the Georgina when it was realised that the name Herbert River in North Queensland was already well established. The explorer also named the "Lagoon" Lake Francis, but fortunately by chance the Aborigines' phonetically sounding name of Camooweal was passed onto the nearby township which sprung up, and so to posterity.

The Sydney Mitchell Library makes it clear, notably through a pamphlet entitled Pioneering Days ... across the Wilds of Queensland with sheep to the Northern Territory ... by George Sutherland (published 1913) who accompanied the droving expedition in 1863 and stayed on at the new Mataranka was established in 1913. See Introduction, Ch.5, p.72.

Geo. Sutherland, Pioneering Days: Thrilling Incidents Across the Wilds of Queensland with Sheep to the Northern Territory In the Early Sixties, (W.H. Wendt & Co. Ltd., Brisbane, 1913).
holding Rocklands through the terrible years of drought that eventually forced a retreat back to civilisation a very few years later. The same drought drove all the settlers back off the tablelands (those that had followed the Rocklands people out), and when good seasons were again assured about a decade later, the new settlers who arrived to reoccupy the Barklys were much puzzled at the relics of a former settlement which had abandoned (and at the same time forfeited) their holdings. The "second wave" were apparently totally ignorant of the first settlers of the early sixties (which goes to show how meagre news of the "outside world" was obtainable, meaning authentic information ref. their own state [colony] and country, in these early years of much pioneering expansion and change).

The droving trip to the new country which was to be named Rocklands started out from Rockhampton in 1863, where eight thousand sheep had been procured and driven some thirteen hundred miles over a period of seven months to accomplish journey's end, Mary Lake on the Georgina River (then known as the Herbert). A Mr William Lyne was in charge (he later became a Member of Parliament and was eventually knighted). The country taken up was named Rocklands on account of the many gibbers and goolies (Aboriginal words) lying about the flat open country. The new arrivals did not know whether they were in Queensland or South Australia (the latter at that time included the whole of what is now the Northern Territory). The boundary between Queensland and South Australia was not then surveyed, at least not in those parts.

However, Lyne and his people felt sure they were pretty close to the border, whichever state [colony] they were in, and this later proved to be correct. They were just a few miles inside Queensland (that was the homestead on Mary Lake: it is still there today). However, the run extended well over the South Australian border, and stock had definitely
been grazing on that area since their arrival; so that George Sutherland's claim that they were the first to run stock on the tablelands seems quite justified (that would be in 1864), although many interested people (including the authoritative H.G. Lamond) consider that either Avon Downs or the pioneer pastoralist J.C. Ranken held the distinction. An ironical fact of Sutherland's claim is that the first stock on the Tablelands (other than, of course, riding- and pack-horses) were sheep, which were to fail so signally in the north on all attempts.  

The Rocklands party arrived adjacent to Mary Lake late at night, with the sheep famishing for a drink, but they smelt the lake water when still miles off (the breeze evidently blowing down wind from the water) and the drovers actually being unmounted (the men had driven the flock on foot, all the time), could not control the mob when they stampeded for the water: a miniature cattle rush, as it were. It so happened a big mob of blacks with their many fires were camped alongside the water where the sheep closed in, and terrified at seeing the rushing sheep, the very first they had ever seen, the tribesmen at once fled, leaving many weapons and camping utensils behind. Sutherland explains in his pamphlet (not published until 1913): "Even to this day the Georgina blacks practise a corroboree indicating 'the rush of sheep to water at night'." He speaks very highly of the Georgina blacks' fine physique and virility, and from his apparently not inconsiderable experience, always considered them at least comparable with any Aborigines in Australia. Tindale's map (previously many times referred to) depicts the Rocklands homestead near the boundary of the Indjilandji tribe to

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the north and the Wakaja to the south, with the Ngoborindi close to the north-east.

A few days after arriving at this permanent camp, the party were surprisingly attacked about dusk whilst at tea. With the exception of one revolver, all the firearms were in their tents some short distance away. The chap with the revolver fired a couple of shots into the darkness, and amidst a shower of spears etc. everyone made for their firearms. Had the blacks followed them up quickly, remarks Sutherland, they must have killed all hands before they could bring their guns into action. But fortunately the attackers could not resist "cleaning up" everything handy in the way of foodstuffs and eating appliances, even camp ovens, etc. They then hurriedly fled as the whites started shooting. Apparently there were no casualties on either side, but the fellow who first shot at the attackers with the lone revolver had a very narrow escape (let alone any of the others, for it seems for a few seconds they sustained a very heavy barrage from the attackers): a spear carrying away his hat, which was found the following morning actually pinned to a tree by a spear-head. However, it came as a timely warning and lesson for the whites, not to take the blacks for granted, and to be always armed and on the watch for them.

As already mentioned, these Overlanders arrived on the Georgina during a prolonged drought, and as the waterholes dried up they followed up the remaining waters. In due course they occupied Lake Francis (adjacent to [the] site where Camooweal township later sprung up), which was only a few miles southerly from the homestead camp, until it also dried up. Here the tribesmen registered their resentment of losing their waters one by one, by catching one of the whites momentarily off guard and putting him to sleep for "three days" after being knocked on the head with a heavy blow from a nulla-nulla (a direct blow, not thrown). Of
course the blacks were fired on, but got away without casualties; but from thence onwards they were hunted right off the water altogether, at the point of a gun (probably several guns!). Eventually the whites followed up the waterholes southwards down the Georgina River.

The Aborigines felt the loss of their waters more and more keenly and often threatened attack, but the whites having learnt their lesson were much too watchful, and the blacks had also learnt their lesson: that spears and boomerangs were no match for guns and bullets. They were loath to press home the attack as they could not catch the whites off guard. Apparently they just had to clear out and find water on new country unoccupied by the whites (which of course would be poor country of little or no water). And still the long drought dragged on.

During an acute shortage of rations, pigweed and bluebush was the only vegetable diet. They had plenty of mutton, but no salt at all for a considerable period. Worst of all, the tobacco supply ran right out. However, Sutherland and one other drove the dray northward some two hundred and fifty miles to the new settlement of Burketown on the Albert River, adjacent to the south-east coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria and secured what rations they could, relieving the situation at Rocklands. The dray party had some trouble with the blacks, but were well-armed and watchful all the time.

About this time a "packet" from Batavia brought the "yellow jack" fever to Burketown, almost wiping the inhabitants right out. Eventually the long drought, to say nothing of the prevailing acutely distressing economic depression which had gripped the pastoral industry in the later sixties, resulted in Rocklands being abandoned along with all the other holdings on the tablelands as already remarked, and settlement of that country was delayed for another decade or so.
Two or three ringers pulled out as the Queensland border was approached, for very good reasons best kept to themselves, although odd ones made no secret of the fact they were wanted by the Queensland police, and actually skited about it, even to what they were wanted for. The Mates were not bothered with these difficulties, but they had gradually become bored with the idea of a really long trip with the mob "down Inside", particularly now that the latter had quietened down and would become more so, so they decided they would finish up on reaching the Weal and make back for some buffalo shooting in Arnhem Land (just like that!).

The Weal (the slang of the then prevailing vernacular, and another phrase was also used, but not in print, depicting the miserable township as the world's worst place to exist in) was sure an insignificant enough hole, hundreds of miles from anywhere and there was absolutely nothing for a couple of young fellows to do for amusement but get drunk and keep that way, which was just what a few poor devils were doing. The Lads camped on the Georgina a few hundred yards from the "town", on the lagoon the blacks knew as Camooweal (meaning white lily lagoon). It contained a fair amount of water, and a few white lilies to boot. There was plenty of company camped about, mostly drovers coming from or going to the Territory or waiting about to pick up a job, and mobs of cattle passing through every few days. Some of these mobs kept on east a couple of hundred miles or so bound for the railheads and trucking per Cloncurry way, but most turned south down the Georgina, a few to Adelaide via the notorious Maree Track, but the majority turned east down along the river some way, into different parts of Queensland for various railhead truckings.

The Mates later heard their mob had kept the stock-routes right down into New South Wales, but they never had any regrets at pulling out at
the Weal; and so after a bare couple of days on the Lagoon the Lads packed up and headed back for the Territory. They had six horses including two packs and "all the money in the world", were travelling back to adventure and felt they "wouldn't call the Governor their uncle" (popular slang sayings of the times). The trip across from the Victoria had taken a good three months, and the Lads would not have missed out on it for anything. They would now be able to hold their own in any company: very few "knockabout" young fellows could talk of having crossed the Territory with cattle. The Boys were feeling well pleased with themselves.
Chapter 25

BACK TO ANTHONY'S LAGOONS AND NORTH TO BORROLOOLA

The Mates arrived back at Anthony's Lagoons without experiencing anything out of the ordinary. Pushing the cattle from Anthony's to the Weal, some three hundred and fifty miles, had taken over a month, but the return trip per saddle-and pack-horses was accomplished under half that time. The Lads had decided in the meantime it would probably be best to make back to Darwin first and get together the necessary buff. shooting plant.

The usual company was camped around the "Lagoons" (another name-shortener for Anthony's Lagoons) and it appeared a couple of "half-castes" (as previously mentioned, the phrase included anybody with more or less white and Aboriginal blood in their veins) were about to start back north for McArthur River station, up Borroloola way. There was also a half myall "salt-water" boy from the shores of the Gulf (of Carpentaria). Apparently he had been induced out of his own country by a couple of prospectors who were starting out for the Centre and wanted a boy as horse-tailer etc., and "much bakka and plenty good tucker" was the irresistible bribe. On reaching Anthony's, far from his own country and homesick, the boy cleared out and hung about for suitable company that he might accompany back to his own tribal lands up the Loo way. He couldn't return on his own, being dead scared of the unfriendly (to say the least) tribesmen who roamed the bush between him and his people.
The Mates had heard a lot about Borroloola, and were much intrigued with the storied locality. They had been discussing the idea, and now overnight (as it were) they decided to go to the Loo (as Borroloola was popularly known), sell up their plant, and on to Darwin per lugger or small boat of some kind.

After a couple of days' camping it was decided to go along with the half-castes. They seemed to be decent enough fellows, and at the time were pleased with the arrangement of going along together. They had delivered some cattle to a drover at the Lagoons and were, of course, travelling back per saddle and pack. The salt-water boy, another "Smiler", was delighted with the prospect of joining the party, but made it plain he would go along as the Mates' offsider, and didn't seem to want to have anything to do with the two half-castes. And so the party set off, barefooted Smiler walking and wearing some rags at the Mates' insistence. It was noticed at once he kept pretty close behind the Lads, making it plain he had adopted them. Camped that night about twenty-five miles out along the track, and track was right, it couldn't under any circumstances be called a road. The half-castes seemed a bit moody as sundown approached, and were no better the following morning. Smiler had camped as close to the Mates as allowable, keeping them between himself and the camping half-castes some thirty yards off. The Lads reckoned they were sulking for some reason or other. Probably they didn't like the idea of the salt-water boy travelling with the party. There was no intermingling over the camp fire that night, and the campers settled down for the night without any discussion over the time of starting off the following morning, etc..

Smiler seemed very nervous of the coloured company, and when questioned made it clear he considered them "na'goo" (no good), and advised the Mates, "Washem plenty allatime" (watch them closely). Under
the circumstances it was thought a good idea to quietly take turns of keeping awake during the night, with loaded revolvers under "pillows", "just in case". They were catching up with the Old-timers in taking no chances. Incidentally, they judged the time ref. "sentry go" by the movement of the Cross, which they had been studying and discussing many nights whilst lying in open camp staring up at the myriad of stars in the brilliant heavens, their only roof for many months. They (the stars) stood out wonderfully clear and bright on those northern tablelands, and seemed very close to our earth. It was thought that Smiler didn't sleep at all that night, every now and then sitting up looking round and listening. Incidentally, he slept well once the Lads were up and stirring, and the latter allowed the poor devil to do so. During any halt during the day's travelling Smiler was asleep in two minutes, and the Mates also occasionally felt themselves nodding off, even in the saddle.

The half-castes were up before piccaninny daylight, but made no attempt at all to converse with their travelling neighbours, and the latter had decided to ignore them altogether unless they were approached, just let them pack and start off on their own if they wanted to. And that is just what they did do. This state of affairs suited the Lads, who reckoned they'd be better off on their own rather than put up with the sulky b------. Strange to say, the sulky ------s were amongst the first to welcome them at McArthur River station, with grins and an easygoing air suggesting the Mates were their old friends. There was no solution at times, it seemed, for a certain disposition (popularly referred to these days as "putting on an act"), that a person of at least some Aboriginal blood, could "turn on", and this was the explanation reached after the affair had been discussed with various Old Hands. Most critics suggested the half-castes became resentful of the
salt-water boy being allowed to travel with the party and his placing himself under the Lads' protection, whom they (the half-castes) probably regarded as "only mug newcomers from the south anyway", should have made more fuss of them, etc. and so on.

About sixty miles out from Anthony's, Valhalla Downs was passed, "temporarily deserted". (Those days the name was pronounced Valhalla, but on perusing recent maps it appears for at least some time the name has been changed to Wallhallow.) Some time later this holding was deserted altogether. It was founded in the eighties by the brothers Christian.¹ As always, the sight of a deserted pioneer homestead had a somewhat depressing influence on the travellers, and they rode in moody silence for a while, but only for a while. Youthful spirits are hard to keep down when travelling through new country, with so much changing environment being met with and discussed.

Then the northern escarpment of the Barklys was reached (the "jump-up" or "tumbledown"), a steep drop from the plateau of several hundred feet, the broken jump-up extending to right and left as far as the eye could reach (as a matter of fact upwards of a hundred miles or so either way). The scenery was magnificent! The open tablelands were to be left behind at last, with apparently much rugged and undulating bushland to be traversed, and through it could be seen stretches of the wild Kilgour River (which eventually emptied into the McArthur). In the distance low ridges climbed into the bold buttresses of the Abner Ranges, which in places stood out red under the westerning sun. And here not far from the "fallaway", the Lads camped for the night.

¹See Hill, The Territory, p.172.
The following morning the tumbledown (or jump-up) was negotiated, and it was noticed how the wagon tracks followed the line of least resistance and zig-zagged down the ridges, and it was remarkable how they twisted and turned, and at that it must have been a precarious undertaking. Apparently the teams carting stores from the Loo to the tableland stations always travelled in company, sometimes several together, and helped each other over the difficult stretches. Some camel teams were also used, and later along the track a couple of the single-humped beasts were seen running wild with the still wilder cattle. Since leaving Anthony's no strange Homo sapiens had been encountered, but Smiler was quick to pick out the half-castes' camps. Incidentally, they were covering more country between their camp downs than the Mates. But hereabouts along from the jump-up they were pleased to run into company coming from the Loo.

They were just a couple of knockabout stockmen on the move with the usual small mob of horses, "thought they might still pick up a bit of droving going inside" (travelling east into Queensland and civilisation). Although it was barely mid-morning, an involuntary halt was made and the billies and quart pots boiled. The travellers from the Loo had big international news to relate (and the Lads had heard some talk of it back at Anthony's). Several of the big European powers were on the brink of war, over an Austrian Duke being assassinated whilst visiting the tiny country of Serbia in the Balkan Peninsula. One of the "news carriers" seemed well versed in the subject (unusual those days among bush and outback people, generally they had very vague ideas of international affairs, were just not interested enough).² Apparently if

serious trouble developed and Austria tackled Serbia (and it seemed quite likely), the giant Russia was in treaty bound to go to her aid, in which case Germany was in the same position as regards actively helping Austria, and France likewise as regards actively lining up with Russia, and finally England was committed to join up with France. In fact the alliance of Britain, France and Russia versus the Central Powers of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey (although the latter for some time was on the doubtful side). And that is just what eventually happened, with other minor powers sooner or later being drawn in.

However, there had been much sabre-rattling the past few years, but the crisis had always blown over without resort to arms, and it was hoped and for some little time expected to end the same way this time. But there were two men in that little gathering of four (excluding of course the salt-water boy) that met by chance that morning and discussed the subject "whilst the billy boiled", on the track from Anthony's Lagoons to Borroloola (approximately sixty or seventy miles one way along the track and some one hundred and twenty-five miles in the other direction, from any habitation, and to all intents and purposes it might just as well have been a thousand miles from anywhere!): Young Bill and the "news bearer" already mentioned [sic].

Harry Jones, being a southern Irishman and a "senfenien" [Sinn Fenian] couldn't care less and probably hoped England would be involved and get a thorough hiding, and the second traveller from the Loo was as already remarked practically dumb on the particular subject, and represented the great majority of people of at least the "bush" and "outback" Australia: the whole business was too far away on the other side of the world to bother about, and anyhow, "What difference would it make to Australia who won? None at all." But the two international news-wise people mentioned knew that if the worst did happen, it would mean a great deal
to Australia and a tremendous influence on the lives of the country's population. Jonsey dismissed the subject with the remark, "Silly lot of b------, serve 'em right!!" However, Young Bill and the other interested party had a good yarn on the latest news, something they were both very interested in. The former was actually young and selfishly foolish enough to hope matters would come to a head, for of course he would enlist and probably get a trip overseas, may even be lucky enough to seem some of the fighting and have something to talk about for the rest of his life, and of course, he never had any doubt but that he would get back to Australia unharmed (such are the meanderings of romantic and adventurous youth). Young Bill was also definitely possessed of patriotic sentiments engendered from his English father, and past associations with school Junior Cadets and the Boy Scout movement.

The Anthony's bound travellers also brought other news of a local nature. There was a big mob of "niggers", myalls, on the move back along the track, on a walkabout of some serious "blackfeller business" or other, and the Lads were warned not to take any chances with them. Otherwise they were harmless enough: "Just let 'em know you're well armed and won't stand any nonsense, and don't give 'em any chance to 'visit' your camp at piccaninny daylight," that is, shift your temporary camp after dark to a preselected suitable position, and use no fire or horse bells etc., etc.. The mates had already practised this when travelling with drover Herb Cuthbert in myall country to the south-west of Victoria River Downs.

And so in the early afternoon the party broke up, and Young Bill often wondered afterwards what influence, under the circumstances, the next few years had on their lives. Probably not much, come to thing of it, they were not the enlisting type, especially when one had to travel some
thousand miles or so at one's own expense to accomplish same. For the
Federal Government in its wisdom to speedily settle more people in the
Northern Territory, positively discouraged any volunteers for war
service from that state [territory]. And in spite of the world
catastrophe the Territory boomed, the government pouring millions of
sterling "down the drain" in an all out endeavour (ultimately
unsuccessful) to set the Territory on the way to prosperity and
population; and whilst those who were foolish enough to go to the war,
those who remained behind had the time of their lives cashing in on the
pennies from heaven (wages and conditions rapidly improved, enormously).
So perhaps our two travelling stockmen from Boorooloola (as 'twas spelt
in the vernacular those days), had a comparatively pretty good time for
a few years whilst Father Christmas poured the capital into the
Territory, until the supply of same ultimately ran out, and the blue
heaven was over and finished with.

For the remainder of the day the Lads thought it a good idea to take
every precaution against myall ambush. They had noted the two
travellers met that morning wore their revolvers and had their rifles
slung handy in greenhide gun buckets, and knew of course they were
loaded. So the Mates once more adjusted their revolvers likewise (the
light ones) and slung their rifles, the .44 and the .303 (procured from
the Victoria River Downs store) duly loaded and "one in the barrel". In
passing through scrubby patches now becoming more prevalent, likely
myall ambush country, the rifles were carried across the saddle pommels,
ready for instant use.

Camp was made (temporarily) in the early afternoon, and as the horses
would be close tethered that night they were turned out handy enough, to
pick about under the close supervision of Smiler. The Mates had a lay
off in turn, as they intended keeping alternate watch throughout the
night. It was expected the boy would spend a sleepless and alert night (and in the event that's just what happened), but it was reckoned not wise to depend overmuch on him. An hour or so after dark (and there was no moon until later in the night), a quiet move away from the temporary camp for a mile or so was made and a camp taken up in the middle of a bareish plain a little distance off the track. By keeping a good lookout it would be impossible to be surprised in this position; no fire or bells of course (the Lads were non-smokers and Smiler was confined to chewing), and no talking above a whisper. The horses were all hobbled and closely tethered down. Neither of the Lads slept much, and lay down literally clutching their firearms. The boy didn't sleep until after daylight the following morning. However, the night passed quietly enough, and at daylight the horses were given another couple of hours' pick whilst their tailer indulged the sleep of the just, and was allowed to.

In mid-afternoon of that day Young Bill and Jonsey were riding along abreast and nursing their loaded rifles, whilst Smiler was bareback on one of the spare hacks keeping the remaining three horses (including two packs) up with the riders. The northern journey was gradually becoming more tropically junglified, and the country to either side ruggedly hilly enough at times, but there was still some patches of Mitchell grass. On the whole the timber was improving, snappy gum, some fine messmate dense enough at times, and a pretty looking tree called carbeen gum; also some bauhinia. The tropical pandanus pine was now more prevalent, amongst other palms. Ant nests were also becoming more numerous and bigger and taller, including the "compass" variety pointing north and south.

Rounding a ridge that ran down toward and in from the track, both horses pricked their ears and snorted in alarm, looking suddenly to the
right. The Mates involuntarily and at once following their mounts' glance saw a big mob of blacks (myalls) in full war paint and heavily armed with spears, boomerangs, shields etc. Counted later, there were over thirty of them. They stood in line and about one hundred and fifty yards from the riders up the side of a ridge running parallel with the track, immovable as statues and staring hard. To say the Lads received a start is putting it mildly, and the first impulse was to run or bring the rifles up into a threatening position. Fortunately these tactics died on the impulse. Harry Jones (generally a leap ahead of the slower thinking Bill) then said (what his mate was thinking and about to say), "Keep going as if nothing unusual was happening, but don't take your eyes off them." They then gave the blackfellow sign of friendship: arm extended parallel from the elbow with palm turned upwards. Only then was there a movement from the myalls, an elderly bearded man stepping forward and returning the peace sign, barked out some instruction to the rest, whereupon they adjusted their spears to the peace sign, points to the ground, and stood relaxed. The old leader fellow now moved forward and signed for the Lads to approach them for a powwow. But the former answered with the clenched fist moving up and down and pointing to the way they were travelling, meaning of course they were in a hurry to get on. A few sticks of "kill 'em dead" tobacco twist was generally carried handy in the saddlebags for friendship or trading purposes, and happily same was handy enough that day. Throwing several plugs on to the track and again giving the signs of peace and "am in a hurry to keep going", the mounted travellers carried out the latter sign to the letter. Meanwhile poor Smiler, frightened out of his wits, deserted his post, and slipping off his mount cringed on the near side of the riders, keeping them between himself and the myalls. The "spares" (spare horses) caught the alarm from the leaders, but fortunately did not run off as could easily have happened, and were content to nose in and take
up pretty well the same position as their tailer (the boy). So all's well that ends well! the travellers agreed. The last seen of the myalls they were gathering up the "nigger twist" and waving friendship branches broken from nearby scrub.

The Lads were feeling very pleased with themselves and congratulated each other over the whole affair. Later on discussing the experience with Old-timers, the Mates had confirmed what they had pretty well been thinking: the myalls were "having them on". They knew of course the travellers were not long up from the South. Incidentally, smoke signals had been observed the previous couple of days but the Lads had become accustomed to same and "familiarity breeds contempt". Apparently (the new arrivals had come to realise) the humourously natured blacks were fond of a joke of this nature and would "put it over" at opportunity, just to note the reaction of the surprise and panic (if any) the victims would exhibit. It appears the only danger our travellers were in was that had they panicked and ran, they would have most assuredly been pursued with spears, boomerangs etc. flying in their direction, amidst loud cries of derision. The real danger was that they generally (most of them) became excited and lost their heads, and the victim (or victims) could easily enough be "kill'em dead all about". On the other hand, if the intended victims initially lost their heads and started firing, the myalls were sufficiently far off and in chosen environment to disappear very rapidly. Here again was danger for the intended joke victims, for if any of the blacks were hit, their mates would be out for retaliation (an eye for an eye etc.) both immediately or "some day longa time", they had long memories in these matters.

The Lads came to realise there was a lot to be learnt and understood about the blacks. They were possessed of a mentality of their own, and it took not a little experience and interest to acquire the knowledge
necessary to really get along with them. Anyway the Mates thought they had made a good start on the whole, and one day would thoroughly understand them. However, "the plans of mice and men often come to naught!"

That evening it was deemed prudent to repeat the procedure of the previous night (and whenever thought necessary along the track). The travellers thought they were becoming proficient at these tactics, in fact were well on the way to considering themselves "Old Hands".

The boy of course was the first to hear it! The sounds of corroboree coming downwind with the seasonable south-east monsoon, now eased off to just stirring for the night. Smiler was sure it was their dubious friends of the morning making big corroboree a long way off. But when asked why they were there and what for, the only explanation that could be got out of him was that it was "blackfellow business". The party went on all through the night and didn't ease up till piccaninny daylight. It was fascinatingly weird to be lying under the stars listening to the wild music, and none the less so in that it rose and fell with the softly modulating breeze. The Mates were once more impressed and fascinated with the experience, and discussing same reckoned the North was getting into their blood.

The following day the travellers passed the vicinity of Mallapunyah Springs, wild and rugged enough country. A few years following the Lads' sojourn through this country, it was taken up by pioneers Mr and Mrs George Darcy. Mrs Darcy had Aboriginal blood in her veins. Darcy had been a teamster for some years, and apparently his wife had influenced him settling down at Mallapunyah Springs. Probably the locality was included in the country of her parent tribe. It was a wild and unaccessable place for many years. These people reared fifteen
children at the Springs, and without any medical assistance. They had a large and magnificent tropical garden near the homestead, and as time went on George Darcy added a large area of cattle country to the enterprise.

A very sad and tragic episode must be related ref. this magnificent pioneer family. Came the year, approximately 1944, and the month October, close up to the wet season, Mrs Darcy accompanied by her youngest son of ten years, set out one day on foot to look for a strayed donkey. The bush just swallowed them up and no trace has ever been found of them. It rained heavy enough the first night out, obliterating all tracks. But a tremendous search was organised and carried out, help coming from as far away as Camooweal and Port Darwin. Scores of skilled bushmen helped by the world renowned trackers and aeroplanes (the Second World War was on) scoured hundreds of miles of the surrounding country for weeks, but the result was a complete blank. All sorts of theories have been advanced ref. the disappearance, including the writer's: just one of those rare cases that crop up once in years, of becoming bushed or incapacitated by accident, or both, (and Mrs Darcy was known as an exceptionally good bushwoman!) and eventually perishing amidst thick scrubland. Perhaps the searchers passed within a short distance of the acutely suffering victims or even their remains, several times. Many people thought the disappearance was the work of some mysterious sadistic madman, and same could be true. However, the tragedy happened about twenty years back from this chronicling, and the disappearance is as much a mystery as ever. It will probably never be solved. But at the time of the Mates' sojourn through that country (1914), it was uninhabited, just part of the Big Run (originally twenty-two thousand
square miles). The Lads pushed on a few miles further to the Top Springs, a noted and popular camping resort for travellers, an oasis in the wilderness along the lonely bush track, as it were. Friendly Abos and their special line of trade (including some truly fine types) always closed in on the place when the "smokes" signalled the approach of travellers. This meant fresh company and amusement of a sort, even if the trade (black velvet) was not taken advantage of; but lots of travellers took full advantage of same, chancing the risk of V.D.. A few forlorn graves adjacent to the place, one of a white man speared to death in the bad old days, and local gossip had it that 'twas well enough deserved: taboo "black velvet" of course. The rest would be fever and delirium tremens cases, the latter following gum tree sprees at the Springs.

The Mates were of course always well versed ref. the track ahead: camping grounds (which always included water) and, very important, alternative side tracks to be ignored, and there were odd ones, such as the turn-off to Dungaminnie (see Chapter XXIII ...). Probably all the rest lead to patches of cattle country which the Big Run occasionally took advantage of. It was the strict unwritten law of the bush that no traveller should miss out on all the detailed information necessary in reference to the track ahead, and the onus of this responsibility rested heavily with the person giving the information. One must be very sure same was passed on correctly, and understood by the recipient.

However, the Lads were the only campers at the oasis on this occasion other than the visiting half myall Abos, and truth to tell the latter's

3In relation to the Darcys, Lavender may have consulted Ernestine Hill's "Rugged Are The Ranges", Walkabout, Vol.12, no.3, (Jan. 1946), pp.29-34.
company was welcome, on the principle that any company was better than none. A day's camping was taken here, the horses wanting a bit of a spell badly, a week or two for preference. They had been pushed pretty hard the last few weeks and were beginning to look a little poor and jaded. The Mates would have liked to spell a while longer here, but the tuckerbags were getting too low to appease the visitors, and could only be recharged at McArthur River station some days' travelling ahead. The salt-water boy had enjoyed a good win here. One of his tribe had been adopted by the local group, and he was welcomed and made happy at last. The Mates thought they had lost their offsider, but he clung to them on departure, apparently determined to get back to the coast.

Getting on from Top Springs and leaving the turn-off to Dungaminnie behind (about one hundred and twenty miles out from Anthony's), Crawford's Face came into view (Cape Crawford on modern maps) away to the north-east: more rugged red buttresses, and the Lads were much intrigued to spot Crawford's Head, supposedly an outstanding feature of the spur. It was there alright, providing one were on the lookout for same and sufficiently used their imagination, so thought the Mates.

Lindsay Crawford had been one of the pioneers of McArthur River station, and in the late seventies or early eighties, in company with the explorer Earnst Fernance [Ernest Favenc], were credited with being the first white men to reach the Barkly Tableland from the northern coast, which they did per the McArthur River valley. Crawford was also the first manager of Victoria River Downs, sticking it for over ten years (what a life?!). He eventually died of fever at Newcastle Waters about 1911, where he was buried beside the "Overland" (the north-south telegraph line and accompanying track that eventually became the
bituminised Stuart Highway).^4

The tall cane grass and other growths were beginning to become more or less of a nuisance, and the blacks were already trying to burn some of it off, but apparently it wasn't quite ready for burning, which would come later. But it did make a lot of haze and smoke. It had always been the custom of the blacks to burn out the present game and make young grass for fresh tucker to graze on. The sun was becoming warmer and there were odd mosquitos and flies about, also sandflies. Later in the year of course, they would be something damnable.

And so the travellers made McArthur River station homestead, just a small group of straggling rough huts. And whilst we're on the particular subject, it was still a joke put over to anybody who hadn't heard it before, that although there were forests of anti-white-ant cypress pine in the bush toward the coast, the original owners in their wisdom had Oregon pine brought by steamer at great expense to the Carrington Landing in the McArthur River mouth, then per teams to the site of the head station camp, for building the manager's residence, men's huts etc.. The result had been a magnificent banquet for the billions of local white ants, who just about gobbled the lot up the first wet season. The travellers had already heard the story more than once, but never had the heart to admit it.

However, there was more important news awaiting the Mates at McArthur River station: several of the great European Powers were "right into it", with England not yet involved but expected to be so "shortly". Even the blacks knew all about it, and it was wondered why the

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^4See Hill, The Territory, p.232.
travellers had not heard all about it from the niggers back at the Springs. The station blacks at least knew "big feller Gvamnt alonga tother side salt water plenty killem all about dead," and would point their chins and pout their lips to the north. The Mates then recollected the Abos back at the Springs did know something, but it was thought at the time they only confirmed what the Mates had picked up from the two travellers back toward the jump-up. But the best news that awaited the Lads at the Big Run homestead was that Alf Brown's lugger was expected at the Loo any day with a cargo of white man's tucker etc., from Burketown way (south-east corner of the gulf) and that Alf was going on to Palmerston (Port Darwin) on "business", and if not already booked up, would probably welcome a couple of passengers. If the travellers were lucky they would land on their feet here, and no time lost.

The Lads couldn't get going fast enough for the last lap of their journey to the Loo. Two of the Big Run stockmen made them an offer for their six horses, and knowing of course they would have to sell them at the Loo, the offer was not so hot; but it was accepted on condition four of them (including two packs) would not be handed over until the Loo was reached. There was no trouble re that score: "They were welcome to, and leave them with Tom Lynott the publican." Men trusted each other out there those days, and were very seldom let down. It was the unwritten law of the bush and very seldom violated, but when it was, the perpetrators were done for good, blackballed right out of the country and worse.

It was something like fifty miles on to the Loo. (Remember the mileages quoted are what they were reckoned to be over half a century back and were perhaps inclined to be the maximum and over, but as the old tracks have been straightened out and minutely taped, distances will
have shrunk, sometimes considerably, since the times we are writing of.) Freshwater (Johnston River) non-man-eating alligators bred in the river here, but with the full moon tides at times backing up flood waters in the wet, the salt-water monsters (crocodiles) came well up the river and would sometimes be trapped until the following neaps, taking toll of cattle and horses and now and again Homo sapiens, generally coloured. The station was in a wild but attractive environment, plenty of pretty trees about and the rugged Clyde Ranges in the near distance.

Boorooloola (officially spelt Borroloola today) was a slurring of the blacks' Booroolooloo, meaning place of many tea-trees. The township was "born" in the early seventies at Leichhardt's Bar on the McArthur River, where explorer Doctor Leichhardt and party forded the river on their journey to the British settlement at Port Essington some couple of decades or so earlier. The old Coast Road from Queensland along the gulf to the Territory crossed the McArthur River at this bar and the new township, supplied by sea route per the river, was meant to attend to some of the needs of the early pioneers on their way to and from the vast areas being taken up further out in the Territory. At that time the much shorter Barkly Tablelands route per Camooweal, Alexandria, Brunette, Anthony's Lagoons and Newcastle Waters had not been opened up, and all overlanders used the Coast Road for a decade or so. Later the Barkly became the route from Queensland to the Territory.  

The Loo (short for Borroloola) boomed as a small bush town for some years, boasting a couple of pubs and three or four stores, with hundreds of people coming and going (including the traffic to and from the

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5W.B.Spencer was in Borroloola in 1901-02. He found it "merely a decayed little township". Wanderings In Wild Australia, pp.561-93.
Western Australian Kimberley goldfields), but at the time of our travellers calling there it had for many years become a dying, dead-end ghost town of its former boom days, and incidentally it has gone back consistently over the past half century since the Lads' sojourn there in 1914. The Loo then boasted one old pub (the original "Leichhardt") and one store. They were owned, apparently, and run by the old brothers Tom and Cliff Lynott respectively. As previously explained, Tom was the first manager of McArthur River station, and the man who found the aged "mystery" foreign speaking tattooed recluse sailor who had been living with the myall blacks out in the Kilgour Gorge country of the Big Run for many years; and both brothers, certainly Cliff, were present at the big massacre of the blacks (minor ones only, it's hoped, had occurred during the drive, terminating in the final slaughter) in Dingaminnie Gorge some time following the "finding" affair related. However, they (the Lynnot brothers) were old men when the Lads met them, and like the majority of the few remaining in the doomed township, lived out the remaining years of their life in that environment.

If an enthusiastic novelist in search of Australiana had "worked" these old Queensland and Northern Territory pioneers over at that time, what a wealth of copy could have been gathered! Young Bill later regretted he could not have put in more time with them, and gradually induced them to "talk". Incidentally, Tom Lynott well remembered the affair of "Silent Jim", a ringer of the Boulia (Queensland) mob in from Alexandria Downs (it may be remembered), who used to "flash" a bad scar on the calf of his leg, received in the earlies whilst besieged by myalls in an isolated hut for a couple of days, on McArthur River station.

Another old fellow who could have been a goldmine on Australiana (unofficial history) was "Old Scrutt", short for Scrutton. He was one of the stockmen who a few decades earlier had assisted the famous
Jardine brothers droving cattle, the first, from a starting point well down in Queensland, to the tip of Cape York Peninsular. As the overlanders reached further and further North, they were almost continually and determinedly attacked by the fine physiqued and virile tribesmen of those parts, and although there were many escapes from ambush and near misses from the tribesmen's weapons, there were, miraculously, no casualties amongst the whites. Incidentally, no mention is made of casualties amongst the blacks, but it is impossible to read a detailed account of this particular overlanding feat without realising there must have been many casualties amongst the Aborigines, the whites so often being compelled to shoot their way out of ambush. Many of these blacks would be the same fierce tribesmen that dogged poor Kennedy and "Jacky Jacky" a few years earlier through this country, eventually spearing the former to death. And there were others of the same ilk.

For the benefit of the new arrivals, Tom was persuaded to explain how the blacks first got the idea of the name "shovel-nosed spear". When managing McArthur River station in the earlies, Tom ordered a few shovels to be sent out, and by some mistake an untoward quantity was forwarded. As a state of plenty encourages a lack of economy, the shovels were regarded as of little value and left lying around carelessly. The ingenious Abos found a way of cutting spearheads out of them, and they turned out a great success. The idea quickly became popular and spread throughout the North, the product appropriately enough becoming known as the shovel-nosed spear.

There were no white women living at the Loo just then, but the place swarmed with full bloods and coloured women of all castes, to say nothing of the bucks. They were all out to humbly serve the white man in any capacity in return for a little "store" tucker, tobacco and other
trinkets. Traffic in black velvet was a general custom, and quite openly practised. About the town itself the blacks wore any old garments cast off by the whites mostly, but away some few hundred yards of the township, most of them wore very little or nothing at all, and the women, from very scanty nagas to loose cotton gowns. It was good tucker country and the river was full of fish. At times, when the ration boat was late arriving, white man's tucker would run right out, and the whole mixed population lived on nigger's fare in the interim.

The Loo also boasted a police station and court room, attended to by a sergeant and two policemen (the district was a very large "Stock and Pastoral" one, entailing much riding about after cattle spearers and worse). The court room building included the famous Carnegie Trust Library, founded some decades earlier by that big public-minded policeman Corporal Power. It had initially been a magnificent collection for such environment, but was fast on the road to decay and disintegration through neglect. Books from this library were scattered from one end of the Territory to the other, and alas, odd beautiful works discarded and left lying around to rot.

It was a gala day for the Loo on the Lads' arrival, Alf Brown's tucker boat having arrived the previous evening. All hands were either gathered around the pub or at the landing some half mile down the river. All the whites were on a more or less holiday binge, but the local police were on the spot to see the blacks were excluded. Nevertheless, they used tact and turned a blind eye in some cases when apparently they felt assured the whites would use the necessary discretion, and trustworthy blacks could be sparingly treated. However, the latter came in for many presents promised them by the whites, which put them in holiday mood also. It was the custom on these rare holidays (arrivals of tucker boats) for the publican to put the grog on the bar counter and
everyone helped themselves. The former would eventually debit the drinkers in the ratio of their capacity to pay, so that the monied folk paid out heavily, and the "down and outs" nothing at all, and the scheme worked. It cost the Lads a fiver each, and although robbery in their case, being very light drinkers, they paid up with affected willingness.

The Abos made a great fuss of the Mates' arrival, certain groups vying with each other for the honour of being the formers' camp offsiders (or more or less just hangers on!). The black velvet that always went with the offer generally played an important part in this transaction, and the "velvet" were not backward in advertising themselves.

When Alf Brown was first approached ref. the Lads' passage to Darwin (and of course he had already heard all about the two young fellows due to arrive in town and who intended approaching him ref. a passage), he eyed the Mates quizzically and said he "would see". The former knew of course he was sizing them up before making any arrangement, but felt no untoward anxiety over the outcome. However, they showed more than a little interest in the loading of some few tons of partly treated tin ore, and felt they were getting on quite OK with Alf, who eventually agreed to take the Mates and their gear (saddlery etc.) along to Palmerston, at a "tenner a piece" and find their own tucker, and they would be expected to stand a lookout (for marauding myalls) and lend a hand generally when necessary. Alf enquired of the Lads, "What about seasickness, ever do a long trip in a small boat!?" The latter admitted they were a little scared of mal de mer, and asked the best way to avoid same. Alf offered the best practical advice the Lads had ever had explained on the subject, which was tried and proved very helpful several times down through the years. "You blokes lay in a good supply of those soda cracker biscuits I've just brought along, and eat practically nothing else for a few days until yer get yer sea legs: no
The Mates took the advice seriously and it paid off, but not one hundred per cent.

The war (the first Great World War, of course) was discussed occasionally, but not very seriously and generally in a casual sort of way. As earlier explained, the great majority of these people had a very vague idea of the world-shaking events that were happening. But on the pub verandah that day, "Borroloola Harry" (a well-known windbag knowall) got a very good hearing from his more or less inebriated audience. Harry reckoned, "They (the European armies) would all get together, and when they were all ready there would be one big 'go', and it would all be over." Apparently the audience were expected to assume that whatever happened or whoever lost or won wouldn't make any difference, life would go on just the same as usual, etc., etc.
Chapter 26

BORROLOOLA TO PALMERSTON

The voyagers had a great send-off after three or four days, when the holiday was beginning to peter out. The first day's sailing was some forty-five miles down to the river's mouth at Carrington Landing where the night was spent swinging on the anchor. Captain Alf, being an Old-timer, had shipped a crew of five including two gins (other than his coloured permanent Mate "Tom") from the eastern end of the gulf, knowing that they would not desert once clear of their own tribal land. They apparently shared two gins between them.

The Essington was really a small schooner of some twenty-five or thirty tons. She was pretty old, but considered a good seaworthy sailor. Alf Brown had been adventuring and trading along the Arnhem Land gulf coasts for some decades. Well up in middle-age, he was a mild-mannered and soft-spoken fellow with mild blue eyes; not at all colourful in personality, but when he started yarning of his experiences back over the years, one appreciated the comments that were oft quoted about him, such as: "A fine quiet fellow, but a dark horse," and "One of the mildest mannered pirates that ever shot down half a dozen murdering niggers in a few seconds" (and in Alf's case it would be in self-defence). He was a very careful man and took no chances at all with the myall (or near myall) blacks, and the bare minimum risk with the open sea. Many years earlier he had been a Northern Territory
Customs Officer, collecting dues from the Malay traders (of Malacca, a few hundred miles to the north) who at that time had been regularly visiting these shores for some hundred years or so, and irregularly since well toward the Aboriginals' Dreaming Time. The Malays traded and dived for pearls, beche-de-mer (trepang), trochus shell etc., until the White Australia policy put an end to it toward the beginning of the present century.¹

During that early period of his activities, Alf Brown was used to attire himself in gaudy coloured sarong and other clothing to match, as per the Malay chiefs, and was known and addressed as the "Commander". The Old-timers often still referred to and addressed Alf by that sobriquet. The Commander "passed on" some few years back, and as far as the writer's knowledge goes left no autobiography to posterity, nor has any scribe (at least as yet) attempted his biography: a great pity, many will agree.²

Alf Brown was qualified of course, to navigate a ship, but apparently preferred to be a "point to point" sailor when practicable, pretty well keeping in sight of land. The Mates suspected Alf preferred as far as possible not to take more than the minimum risk as regards "cock-eyed bobs" and the like (sudden violent storms). However, the compass charts etc. were of course there for use in any emergency.

Alf reckoned to cover the "best part of a thousand miles" before

¹C.C. Macknight's The Voyage to Marege', Macassan Trepangers In North Australia, (Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1976) is a comprehensive study of Macassan contact with North Australia to 1907.

reaching Palmerston. A north-westerly course was taken so as to eventually coast along the western side of Groote Eylandt, and for a day or so the mainland off to port was out of sight. The weather was perfect with a fair wind from the south-east (usual at that time of the year) and the boat bounded along with a bone in her teeth. Except that the Lads were feeling just a little squarmish [*squeamish], "everything in the garden was lovely and God was in His heaven." Then Groote Eylandt came into sight away off the starboard quarter, Mt..... [?Central Hill] in the middle of the island the first landfall to be sighted.

However, something else less welcome started to show up, which developed into a "blow" which Alf referred to as "half a cock-eyed bob" (the latter in full blast was a miniature tornado, and 'twas really dangerous for small boats to be caught up in one, to say nothing of larger ships). As the wind gathered force sail was shortened, but the blow coming from the right direction fairly lifted the boat along toward the shelter of the Emerald River on the island's west coast. The Mates were taking the voyage not so badly until the blow developed, when they both became affected with acute enough seasickness, and were very pleased to reach calm water.

The Dutch captain Abel Tasman discovered (or re-discovered?) and named Groote Eylandt whilst on his voyage of discovery in one of the three ships used in 1644. It comprises an area of some seven hundred acres [?square miles] of jungle clad land with several creeks and small rivers running from the higher terrain in the centre and winding through the dense jungle to the sea. The island is very picturesque viewed from the sea, its dense bush and jungle and bold outstanding red coloured cliffs with silhouetted Aborigines waving salutations, suggesting an air of mystery and creating a keen desire to land and penetrate inland, in
company and well armed of course. There was no white settlement whatever on the island at the time of the Lads' visit (the mission was to come some years later) and the Aboriginal inhabitants were absolutely primitive and dangerous.

A trepang gathering and trading station called Yataba had long been established near the picturesque narrow little river, run by Malays and their Aboriginal helpers, and Alf Brown (who had several such connections along the coast) was wont to ship their products once or twice yearly to Thursday Island. Alf at present was dumping a quantity of rations for the Yataba camp. The trepang was gathered from the reefs and beaches per lugger and the blacks' canoes, cooked in copper-like boilers, then dried and smoked whilst laid out on wire netting shelves under shelter of some sort of a shed. When dried it was bagged up for the China market, via Thursday Island.

The island Aborigines were a fine lot, many showing signs of Malay blood which incidentally under the circumstances, was not very remarkable. The Lads' attention was drawn to two notable characteristics of their way of life. There were practically none of their women hanging about the camp, with the exception of two or three of the helping Aboriginal boys' wives, apparently the oldest and plainest (or ugliest) looking of them, and for very good reasons, the Lads learnt. It appeared these islanders were very jealous of their women, and were not in the habit of allowing them to show themselves off to visiting strangers with a view to "trade". They were kept hidden in the bush, as it were, and visitors to the island may not see them at all, even over a prolonged stay. Nevertheless, there were apparently rare exceptions to the rule, and a mutual agreement would be arranged between a visiting stranger (say a Malay who would be staying for some considerable time) and an Aboriginal who was perfectly happy to barter
his woman (or one or two of his wives) for a satisfactory payment. In other words, the islanders did not trade their women as “black velvet” as the mainlanders did. The second characteristic as mentioned was that these people knew nothing about any sort of boomerang whatever, and apparently never had; and some of their spears were very large with numerous strikingly carved barbs, many highly coloured for ceremonial occasions.

A very interesting diversion occurred when a crowd of Aboriginal children (who were allowed to fraternise with the visitors even if their mothers or sisters were not) steered a huge turtle along the shallows and into the river, and were having a great time riding the captive in or out of the water. The Lads were laughingly invited (by pantomime and a little pidgin) to try a piggyback themselves, and amidst tremendous hilarity from the Abo. kids the Mates stripped and attempted to ride the swimming turtle. Of course there was nothing to it, but the kids by some mysterious handling of the creature induced it to turn turtle (appropriate phrase, what!) and the lads playing up to the fun, pretended to hang on for the ducking and emerged seemingly choking and half drowned. The camp Malays and Abos were also highly amused and laughed to no end, especially the latter, and their women fairly shrieked. Harry Jones and Young Bill wondered if they themselves were later portrayed in corroboree, as they had previously been by the Mutpuras of Victoria River depicting their attempts (somewhat assumed for the amusement of the fun-loving blacks) at mounting and riding camels for the first (and only) time.

The storm subsided during the night of arrival, and the following night was starry and clear. Captain Alf, the coloured Mate, the head Malay from the camp and the two Lads lounged about the stern “gunnel” rails yarning. And whilst the sound of blacks corroboreeing somewhere
in the bush came over varying in tempo with the breeze and fluctuation of the "artists", Alf Brown talked of some of his adventures along these coasts, now and again breaking into the islanders' (the Ingura tribe's) dialect, also Malay "talk", for the benefit of the listening Malay and the coloured man Tom (the latter being just too "civilised" to come under the usual phrase of boy). Anything Alf talked about was interesting, and one story discussed that night (and Tom and the Malay knew the tale and offered Alf much help and confirmation) was most fascinating and unique, so thought the Mates, but the story will be related in due course, when the voyagers catch up with the particular coast involved. Although fifty years have rolled by since that night, "Old" Bill still vividly remembers the fascination of the environment, the company and setting, of that wonderful night's experience (and the Mates were still young enough, Young Bill about to turn twenty, and Harry Jones a very few years older).

The following morning the Essington stood away for the nor'ward, off the east Arnhem Land coast. The second day out from the Emerald River, Woodah Island was passed well off to port (as a matter of fact quite a number of small islands were passed, and the large Bickerton isle). Some nineteen years following the Mates' passing the island in 1914, the locality was apparently still pretty wild and isolated, for a punitive expedition of four Northern Territory police and six trackers landed on the island during the dry of 1933, endeavouring to make arrests of Aborigines for the slayings of trepangers and other traders over the previous decade or two (a reminder of the long and relentless arm of the law). During the hunt, Constable Stewart McColl was speared to death. It appears after landing on the island, four gins were taken into custody and handcuffed, and McColl was left to guard them whilst the rest of the party went after the bucks. A hide-and-seek stalking went
on for some time amidst the dense jungle, the hunters at times becoming the hunted, and several times there was an exchange of spears and small-arms fire. However, no arrests were made and on the patrol returning to camp in the evening, McColl was missing and could not be found. The following morning, after two hours' tracking through the jungle, the constable's body was found, speared through the heart. He had fired two shots from his revolver and a third had failed to discharge. It seems highly probable that the mishap of faulty ammunition or firearms, or both, was at least partly responsible for his death. No arrests were effected on this expedition, and poor McColl's body was eventually buried at Darwin.

In due course a peculiar fracas followed the patrol's return to Darwin, including severe and caustic criticism from the southern and local press etc., concerning the Federal Government's alleged mishandling of the case, in allowing the Church Missionary Societies to peacefully persuade the guilty tribesmen to "come in" and give themselves up and stand trial by British justice. The C.M.S. was also most severely castigated for "carrying out the police's work", and for the manner in which they went about persuading and inducing the tribesmen to "come in". Many people considered the Groote Eylandt C.M.S.'s action in the matter tantamount to undermining other far-flung C.M.S.s' efforts by betraying the blacks' faith in the Missions, in that they were carrying out the work of the dreaded "per-leece", virtually letting them down and selling them out to the police. Be all that hubbub of criticism as it were, the fact remained that the Groote Eylandt C.M.S. did in fact induce fourteen Aborigines to come in, including four suspected murderers, the balance being witnesses, and without any loss of life, whereas an armed patrol may easily enough have reversed that state of affairs.
Two of the murder suspects were eventually hung for the slaying of Japanese, and one charged with the killing of an "unknown man" was discharged through lack of evidence. Constable McColl's slayer, one Tuckiar, was eventually discharged after a prolonged series of trials, during which the pros and cons of very complicated and highly technical evidence was thrashed out by eminent counsel for both prosecution and defence. However, Tuckiar was kept in custody as it were, at Darwin's Myilly Point Mission, "for his own protection": local feeling ran very high against him, by the late Constable McColl's friends and sympathisers. Later Tuckiar escaped from the compound and at least "officially" was never heard of again. Eventually he was believed killed in revenge by the late constable's friends (Darwin could be that sort of a town those days) or by unfriendly tribesmen whilst passing through their country in an endeavour to reach his own tribe in north-east Arnhem Land. Should think the latter would more likely be the case.\(^3\)

As the Essington passed Port Bradshaw well to port, and still making northward, the Mates were not to know that it was here two years later (when they themselves were doing their best to kill Germans and Turks) Captain Luff's lugger Avis was to be attacked and two Thursday Island boys speared to death by the mainland tribesmen; and a second affair occurred in 1923, nine years later, some fifty or so miles further south at Trial Bay, when a Japanese crew were attacked and slayings and woundings occurred. A small group escaped in the dinghy (which would be

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a very small open boat) and rowed considerably over one hundred miles along the coast and over the open sea to Elcho Island well round the north-east coast (no mean feat!). Incidentally, a mission has long since been established on the island. But these regions were, those days of 1916-23, considered "inaccessible" and police action was not considered practicable.

Nor were the Mates to know that come April 1923, some nine years following their voyaging, the schooner Douglas Mawson bound from Normanton (near the south-east corner of the gulf) to Darwin, founded during a storm somewhere off the tip of north-east Arnhem Land. The vessel had a crew of twelve and seven passengers, three females and four men: a Mrs Willett of thirty-five years and her two daughters, Alice fourteen, and Elizabeth four years. No trace was ever found of the nineteen people, although a thorough and extensive search was carried out. But a lifeboat wreckage from the vicinity of Port Bradshaw was definitely proved to be of the founded vessel.

Then in 1924 all sorts of rumours reached Darwin of white women living with the blacks of eastern Arnhem Land, and one of them having borne a child to a tribesman, and 'twas still living, etc.. The rumours became so persistent that a large posse of mounted Territory police, plus sworn in special police, with trackers, horses and other camping gear, were conveyed by the schooner Huddersfield to Arnhem Bay (just west of the north-east tip of Arnhem Land). Here a permanent camp was established. One story the party collected from the Abos was that all the crew and passengers but the two women were killed by the tribesmen, and the women were safe at Port Bradshaw (on the gulf coast about one hundred miles across country eastwards). Lots of clues similar to this one were followed up, the blacks telling any story they thought would best please the white men (and this was duly suspected by the police). All these
clues were proved false after a very long and exhaustive search, pursued right through the following wet.

From retired Constable E.H. Morey of Adelaide, and late of the Northern Territory Mounted Police, comes this most likely explanation ref. the above controversial and much discussed matter, and with the constable's (or his representatives') kind permission, we hereby quote:

Many theories have been written and expressed concerning the fate of the passengers and crew of the missing schooner Douglas Mawson on route from Normanton, Queensland, to Darwin, in 1923. When stationed at Borroloola, 1927-30, and on patrols in Arnhem Land, Arnhem Bay, Port Bradshaw, Caledon Bay, 1932, and Blue Mud Bay area and Groote Eylandt 1933, I always tried to probe the mystery of the reported "White Women of Arnhem Land". Although far from being established beyond all doubt, I believe the genesis of this mystery came to life in the natives' confusion between white women and half-caste women. The white race being but a recent importation into Australia - in terms and comparison with its age-old Aboriginal inhabitants - the natives have no name in their language for the white race or for half-castes. It is feasible to assume, therefore, that a myall native's description of half-caste women would equally apply to white women. About the time of the sailing from Normanton of the Douglas Mawson, two half-caste women and two lubras were enticed aboard a beachcomber's lugger at Borroloola. The lugger sailed up the Arnhem Land coast. At Blue Mud Bay the shanghaied women escaped ashore. Here they were captured by the Balamoomoo tribe, who roamed from the top of the gulf as far south as Groote Eylandt. After being with the tribe for several months, one half-caste woman and the two lubras escaped. The other half-caste woman elected to remain with the Balamoomoo. This woman, the notorious Clara, the "Boadicea of Arnhem Land", became the brains of the Balamoomoo. Speaking the white man's language, she was the bargainer and enticer between the Tribe and trepangers and sea-nomads.

The three who escaped made south to Borroloola. While swimming the Rose River, one lubra, Arbarbidgeemarah, was in the lead, with her two companions following. When the foremost lubra was almost across, she heard screams behind her. Terrified, and threshing wildly, she made for the bank as fast as she could. Scrambling ashore to safety, she looked for the other two women. All she could see was two lines of bubbles moving swiftly down stream - crocodiles swimming along the bed of the river with their victims.... The surviving lubra made her way back to Borroloola, and never left that isolated outpost to go bush again. She became a well-known personality, and worked
at the hotel for many years. Bunny Arbarbidgeemarah grew into a big fat, jolly woman, but in 1941 she lost weight rapidly. Sergeant Gordon Birt, who was stationed at Borroloola, took her to Darwin for medical attention. There she died shortly afterwards.

But like lots of mysterious rumours, the story of the castaway white women living with the Arnhem Land blacks died very hard, and even today over forty years after the wreck of the *Douglas Mawson*, Old-time Territorian bushmen will swear the rumours were facts indeed.

In pursuing in retrospect the "goings on" along these coasts during the decade or two following the Mates' voyaging in 1914, "Old" Bill submits that Alf Brown's stories and anecdotes of the same coasts covering a couple of decades earlier (when it was "officially" considered too inaccessible for police investigation and action), same accounts of earlier happenings were not so exaggerated and unlikely as the Lads considered might be at the time of hearing same. For Alf's tales of the "earlies" went back to the years before the Mates were even born, when the mainland and offshore island tribesmen were ambushing and killing whole Malay crews in retaliation for their women having been previously stolen, generally by some other crews, for the blacks never bothered to discriminate so long as they scored an eye for an eye, etc. Later the Malays out of revenge would induce the blacks (any blacks) to "come out" and trade, and when the victims were least expecting it they would be mown down in the water with ancient muskets and old muzzle-loading ship's light cannon, whilst there was any target left to fire at. And so the mad reprisals and counter-reprisals went on.

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4The source of this quotation has not been found. The incident is referred to in Charles Barrett, *Coast of Adventure, Untamed North Australia*, (Robertson and Mullens, Melbourne, 1946), pp.120-21.
Amongst many others, Alf told the tale of a notorious white wanderer with his lugger who befriended a small island people and actively helped them to wipe out their enemies on a neighbouring small off-shore island, "to the last man" (which would include most likely any unattractive women or children not wanted).

The day Young Bill turned twenty years of age, 22 August 1914, the Essington had rounded the north-east corner of Arnhem Land and was heading westward for the vicinity of Elcho Island (so Alf informed the Lads), with "Chokey" Spencer's old trading grounds, Arnhem Bay, well off to port. Low-lying shore lines, with dense mangrove flats and miles of mud banks: "A brooding and forbidding coast," the Lads agreed.

"Cap'n Brown" was known to many occupants of the canoes that attempted to approach (generally large dugouts carved from a single tree trunk) and conversed with them in their own language. However, the captain allowed no canoe alongside, ordering them to be off, all hands casually(?) handling their rifles and revolvers the meanwhile. A couple of craft, pretending not to understand the "clear out" orders, were treated to shots across their bows, and the recipients then always understood what was wanted, immediately. A double and well-armed watch was mounted every night, plus a couple of the boys, the latter being dead scared of sleep anyway, knowing they were too close off hostile tribesmen's country. Any craft approaching during darkness was shot at point blank, but this seldom happened. Cap'n Alf generally shifted his position a few hundred yards immediately after dark, and no lights at all were shown after this tactic. As Alf himself was want to occasionally remark, "That's why I'm here alive on this coast today after forty odd years of it. Take no chances. I could have been 'outed' long ago like all the others if I'd been careless. Being careful always paid off with me and I've no regrets," etc., etc.. Smoke
signals along the coast constantly informed the tribesmen on ahead of the lugger's approach. Meanwhile, the steady to brisk seasonable south-east wind brought Palmerston (as the Old Hands persistently called Darwin) closer by some fifty to one hundred miles every day.

Rodney Spencer first became widely unpopular throughout the Territory when during 1885 as the definite leader of three other unscrupable "low downs" of his own ilk, they destroyed by the most brutal methods some two dozen fine horses and mules whose mangled carcasses were found in the bed of the Finnis River with their throats cut, and worse. The animals had all been the property of Chinese people. Spencer and his accomplices had all been arrested and charged with the crime. Apparently there had been some sort of a cold war going on between the whites and Chinese teamsters, the latter undercutting the whites, who were considered by many to be charging exorbitant freight rates, hauling machinery etc. from Southport adjacent to Darwin, to the scattered mines. But although Spencer and accomplices were arrested and charged with the crime, racial feeling against the Chinese was running so strong throughout the Australian goldfields just at that time that no jury could be found to bring in a conviction against Chinese [sic], no matter how strong their case, under any circumstances. And so after protracted hearings, the unscrupulous men had to be released. But the vast majority of white men in the Territory really loved horses, including bushmen whose very lives had been saved by their animals, including some on more than one occasion. They could not forget the ghastly affair, and Rodney Spencer and Co. started on a downward slide.

Of Spencer's accomplices, one went pearling, and we will hear more of him later. The others disappeared from the Territory. Spencer went buffalo shooting alone (no white companions). But he compelled a camp following from the blacks, with the aid of his guns, and established his
camps along the Alligator Rivers (some hundred miles or so east of Darwin) long before the famous Paddy Cahill formed Oenpelli station out that way, and improved on Spencer's hunting by shooting from horseback. Spencer was good at the primitive method of shooting buffs on foot, whilst running alongside the herd. He was good at handling the blacks too, from his point of view, for although he was unpopular and feared by the "niggers" (and he had undoubtedly shot a few up), he understood their mentality and read them like a book, and he saw to it that they were frightened of him. Spencer became known to his blacks as "Rod-er-nee".

By this time in the Territory the semi-civilised tribesmen had been pretty thoroughly taught their lesson, that although white men could shoot blacks and "kill 'em dead all about" and that was that, no nigger could kill a white man and get away with it. As previously mentioned, Rodney Spencer was good at shooting buffs on foot, and bagged thousands. His blacks of course did all the skinning, salting, drying etc., all the work about the camp but the actual shooting.

Spencer also mixed somewhat with the trading Malays during his annual trips to Port Essington where his indifference toward the coloured people in general earnt him the silent hatred of those folk. However, toward the end of the eighties, Spencer was arrested and charged with the particularly callous murder of a native at Essington, and was again tried two or three times, the sentences ranging from death to life imprisonment, and eventually he was released after serving ten years at an Adelaide gaol. More racial feeling, this time black versus white. But even the hardened Territorians, deeply steeped in the tradition that no white man should hang for killing a nigger, could not bear the thought of the killer Spencer getting away with such wilful and callous slaying of Aborigines, and of course everybody knew he was guilty of
unnecessary killing — plenty. But there was also a very strong faction (Spencer and all his killings aside) that would not stand for a white man "swinging" for the shooting of a nigger, under any circumstances, and this faction rallied to Spencer's aid (even though many of his "friends" secretly despised him) and it was these people who saved him from the gallows.

After his release from prison about 1900, Spencer returned to Darwin much broken in health and spirit, to find feeling against the blacks had somewhat altered in their favour. And anyhow, when it came to reviewing his affairs in retrospect, everybody knew he had been a cruel slayer of beautiful horses, and unwarrantedly had "holed" too many niggers!! He took to lonely drinking ("drinking with the flies") and brooding: was wont to remark in his cups that nobody cared to associate with him now because he had been in "chokey" (served a gaol sentence). Not so strange perhaps, that in due course his own phrase rebounded against himself, the blacks dropping his old sobriquet of "Rod-er-nee" in favour of "Chokey" (they pronounced it "Cho-kee", behind his back, we may rest assured). So the bitter old Spencer claimed his half-caste son "Jack Bulanda" from the Daly River Jesuit Priests' Mission (in whose charge he had left him when he himself had been sent to prison). The son was now a young man and it is on record he was proud of his dad (one wonders how much the lad actually knew of his father)! Spencer now procured a broken down old lugger, the Nebraska, and set off with his son for the wild coast of north-east Arnhem Land. At that time (early 1900 odd) there was no settlement at all east of the Bowen Straits Customs Camp (situated about one hundred miles north-east of Darwin) and the whole coast from that point eastward and around the north-east tip of Arnhem Land and then southerly into the Gulf of Carpentaria as far as the Roper River in the gulf's south-west corner, was just a huge stretch of some thousand miles or so of "no-man's-land", or "bad lands" as it were!
Spencer recruited his labour from the Goulburn Islands and the King River (near the western end of these coasts). He always wore his heavy revolver at the hip these days (to say nothing of larger small-arms) and the niggers were still frightened of him. They remembered he was a dead shot and would not fail to demonstrate it again if given half a chance. Although Chokey picked his labour up near the western extremity of "his" coast, he established his trading camp hundreds of miles easterly near the north-east corner of the Arnhem coast, which made it pretty well impossible for his "employees" to clear out for home: they were hemmed in, as it were, by hostile tribesmen. And so Spencer traded trepang, pearls etc. to the visiting Malays. But he still hated all coloured men, and well they noted it.

And here in due course his private no-man's-land was violated by a second white man, one of his old horse-slaying associates of eighteen years earlier. Whether Spencer was expecting his old mate and was pleased to see him or otherwise is not made clear, but he may have consoled himself that "birds of a feather flock together". The intruder was the man Gore, who went pearling after the abortive trial for the "murder" of the Chinamen's horses. After it was ascertained that no jury (at least Northern, in this particular case) would ever be induced to convict white men against Chinese, this man Gore and apparently clandestinely as regards the others implicated, had out of flashness and bravado actually (or at least offered) to assist the Crown by turning Queen's evidence against his mates. But they must have felt sure, of course, there could be no retrial at that late stage: they were taking no risk at all.

Gore arrived in "Spencer's Country" in his lugger Venture, and here nemesis caught up with him. One dark night the mainland tribesmen
(Murngin or Jaernuno, probably both tribes\(^5\)) canoed out to the Venture, no doubt with the definite intention of killing all hands and looting the lugger: the general procedure in store along that coast for any disliked and carelessly guarded visitors, and being of Spencer's ilk, Gore was probably hated. For a start the attackers speared Gore through the open cabin porthole, then in attempting to board, Gore's "Serang" (Malay mate or foreman) was killed, but the alarm was now thoroughly on and the bulwarks manned, and the pirates disappeared into the night (a close shave for the remaining Venture crew!). Gore, seriously wounded, now cleared right out with his lugger, and it's not recorded what became of him.

Apparently Spencer pulled himself together somewhat over these years, and presumably he entirely dominated his half-caste son, Jack Bulanda. At this time Alf Brown himself (he informed Young Bill and Harry Jones) was in charge of the custom station at Bowen Straits, and he, Brown, felt sure the visiting trading Malays hated Spencer. He was generally too cunning for them and beat them at their own game, bargaining. Alf explained the Malays always impressed him that "they would have liked to complain (officially) of Spencer's shabby treatment of them, but for reasons best known to themselves, kept quiet. Probably they were smuggling away much undeclared trade, including pearls," Alf thought. "Spencer knew all about it, and used the knowledge as blackmail against them. Likely enough the Malays were even then biding their time to get even with Spencer."

About this time, 1903-04, the renowned North Australian pastoral

\(^5\)These names are from Tindale's 1940 map. The later map has the Nango, Djangu, Dangu and Duwala tribes in the same country.
financier Captain Joe Bradshaw made it known he intended investing upward of half a million sterling on settling some twenty thousand miles of country on the Goyder River, which flows into Castlereagh Bay on the north Arnhem Land coast, a little to the west of Chokey's country. The new station was named Arafura. The white man's civilisation was catching up with Spencer! However, two years later the whole project was abandoned, after thousands of cattle had been stampeded and speared, Chinese and white men in Bradshaw's employ were wounded or murdered and robbed etc., etc.. And so the "show", lock, stock and barrel, was written off as a bad loss. Thousands of the scattered cattle and horses were left to fend for themselves, and their progeny in later years (the few that escaped the blacks' "blue heaven", or pennies from heaven) were eventually rounded up by the small settlers and "poddy dodgers" (cattle duffers). Apparently the victorious marauding tribesmen (and up to several tribes could have been involved) tore the improvements to pieces and burnt up everything possible in a very short time. In the course of a couple of years apparently there was only corrugated iron left to rust away, much of it scattered about the bush where the tribesmen had tried it out for their crude shelters. It appeared certain from some of the tribesmen's tactics in harassing the white "invaders", that they had been helped in their depredations by the more intelligent (or more sophisticated) Malays: a rare state of affairs!

Whilst all this resistance to the white man's intrusion was going on during the wet of 1904, the twenty year old Jack Bulanda (Spencer's son) and a handful of followers sailed into Darwin harbour all "done out" and more dead than alive, with the news that his father Spencer, had been killed by the blacks of Caledon Bay, and that he had found the body and buried it. Yes, nemesis had at last caught up with Chokey (meaning gaol bird), the name by which he had of late years become known by the
Aborigines and Malays, and incidentally the whites. But the "killing" had much more to it than Jack Bulanda made out. He had been "killem'd" alright, but not "killem'd dead", to phrase it in the blacks' idiom.

Subsequently, a police patrol was sent north from the Roper River police station to investigate the reports of murders, including Spencer's, around Arnhem Bay and adjoining country. The police could verify very little as regards Chokey, the blacks contacted adopting their usual line, with stories they thought most likely to please the white man. However, they did confirm that there were two Malay praus in Caledon Bay at the time of the Chokey "fracas", the Mareeja and Using, but of course they had returned home months earlier. Bulanda had already given the same information to the Darwin police, and that there was bad feeling between the Malays and his father, and the praus had actually fired on Spencer's Nebraska, whether from their light muzzle-loading ship's guns, or just small-arms fire, is not made clear.

Then Alf Brown, occasionally prompted by the coloured mate Tom and the Malay cook, wound up with the highlight of the story, and if his listeners were not quite convinced of the truth of it, it was plain enough to discern the tale-teller was. It appeared a few years earlier to the occasion of the tale-telling referred to, say probably about 1910, Alf anchored the Essington off Arnhem Bay. The blacks came out in their canoes to trade, as usual. Amongst their company was a greying red haired and stubbly bearded elderly fellow, quite naked, who apparently was a definite mental case. Alf thought him a Malay or a half-caste. He was frightfully disfigured, both his nose and tongue were missing, in a way that suggested they had been neatly cut away. The poor wretch proffered a bare gummed grin, waved his arms about frantically and uttered queer noises, but he could not enunciate a word. He was apparently excited about the white men and endeavouring to draw their
attention. Then Alf noticed his eyes were blue, although fading: a characteristic along that coast unknown in a coloured man, and Alf felt almost at once he had seen those eyes before, and somehow the red hair and beard came into the picture too. The strange creature became very excited and carried on much "finger yabber" with his associates. Alf said he thought the poor disfigured fellow was trying to put ideas into their heads that brooded [boded] no good for the white men. However, always cautious, Alf ordered the tribesmen away, promising to return the following day. He then shifted the schooner's position to one of comparative safety. The following day the ratty fellow was not amongst the bartering tribesmen, whom Alf handled very carefully, one at a time, and remained fully armed and watchful all the time. But he couldn't forget the ratty disfigured man, and knew he had seen him before.

"Well you fellows have guessed who he was, of course! Yes, it was all that was left of Spencer alright. The coloured people that he'd hated and ill-treated for so long had at last caught up with him, and in their own way. Well, he had it coming to him, or some of it, poor bugger!" It occurred to the Lads the taleteller was not even sorry for him: he must have been detested, thought the Mates. Alf said he guessed it was Chokey shortly after seeing the ratty wreck, and later met Caledon Bay blacks who definitely confirmed it. Alf also declared the idea of the disfigurements would come from the Malays, the Aborigines never took their revenge that way, but apparently the tribesmen were quite happy to connive at the idea. The Old Hands reckoned Jack Bulanda knew much more than he told the police at Darwin, but for some queer reason of his own decided that less said would be soon' st mended. He never buried his father, but he couldn't help thinking and wishing it had ended that way: the power of wishful thinking, as it were?!

Bulanda is supposed to have handed the Darwin police a dental plate
that had belonged to his father, one that had been made for him during his years in gaol. Be that as it may, bushmen often discarded their dental plate for a time, for some reason or other, especially when cut off from civilisation for long periods. "Coloured people, especially half-castes, often harbour queer thoughts and reasoning, and there is no accounting for it by mere whites," so Alf declared (but not in Tom's hearing). 6

Some time later the Essington was headed southward to negotiate Dundas Strait, between Cobourg Peninsula on the mainland to the east, and Melville Island to the west. Captain Alf had the schooner "close hauled" (as he explained) sailing pretty well into the south-easterly, and later was obliged to "tack" a little before turning south-westerly into Van Diemen Gulf, heading for Clarence Strait between the mainland and Melville Island, and thence "only a few(?) furlongs to Darwin", as the captain put it.

Whilst sailing close hauled Alf remarked, "If we kept going straight on this course, we'd just about hit Point Stuart on the mainland. Of course you blokes will remember your Australian history: explorer McDouall Stuart came out at that spot in 1862 when he reached his northern overland journey from the southern coast" etc., etc. Yes, the Lads had "heard something about the locality and the marked tree" etc., and Alf, sensing the young fellows were eager for his story of the mystery(?), cordially obliged, between breaks, during the next hour or so. It appears Stuart's "Marked Tree" and Stuart's "Flag Tree" were utilised on 24 and 25 July 1862 respectively (incidentally, some

6Lavender has used Hill, The Territory, pp.377-87. See also Searcy, In Australian Tropics, pp.286-90.
sixty-two years previous to the Lads passing the locality during 1914). Both trees were practically on the coast of Stuart's Point, the Flagged Tree being some three miles to the north-west of the Marked Tree.

These relics were not located previous to 1883, though several times searched for. In the interim certain members of the Australian public and the Northern Territory in particular, expressed doubts as to whether Stuart had really reached the northern shores of the continent at all. Stuart was the victim of certain caustic criticism, an exceedingly wronged man. However, he was deceased many years before the criticism circulated.

Both trees were eventually located by J. Kingston (surveyor) and Messrs Buckland and Stevens, about 1853 [1883] (some twenty years following Stuart's sojourn). The Marked Tree was some hundreds of yards from tidal water, and in very thick scrub. As usual in similar "findings", the local blacks guided the searchers to their quarries. The tree had been brazed "D.S." by Stuart, in large letters. The tree was a hardwood named Hemicyclia Lasiogyua(?), was about fifty foot high and eight around the base. The blacks also showed Kingston's party the Flag Tree (then "tumbled down" - cut down in the Aborigines' parlance). It had been a mangrove, and owing to the tidal waters shifting the mud and sand through the previous twenty years, it was subject to immersion at high tide.

And from the natives came the story of the end of Stuart's Flag. These natives discovered it shortly after the explorers' departure, and they hurried after them with the intention of returning it (probably expecting to be handsomely rewarded). However, for some reason Stuart and party were not contacted, and the flag was finally distributed amongst members of the tribe. During 1899, the Flag Tree was visited by
an R.T. Maurice and party, the intention being to search for the records
Stuart had buried in a tin container at the butt of the tree. The
search was unsuccessful and it was concluded the container and its
contents had rotted away in the interim. Under the circumstances this
could be likely enough, during the thirty-seven years since they were
buried in 1862. It was again confirmed that the Flag Tree stump had
been below high water mark for many years. The above related facts were
later confirmed during 1902 by G.R. McMinn, Senior Surveyor and also
Acting [Government] Resident of the Northern Territory of South
Australia at the time, accompanied by Police Inspector Foelsche.
Photographs were taken of the Marked Tree.

Then shortly following the "tour" of Messrs McMinn and Foelsche, Mr
Justice Dashwood, Government Resident at Darwin, visited the historic
site and found that the Marked Tree had been burnt completely to ashes,
and from appearance of same, it would have happened only a few weeks
earlier. Incidentally, the adjacent natives could not be induced to
offer any information ref. the burning of the tree, and were obviously
ill at ease at being questioned. One solution is that it was destroyed
because the Aborigines considered it housed evil spirits.

In 1910, the presiding Government Resident had a piece of railway line
erected in the hole where the Marked Tree once stood. (That was over
half a century back from this writer's compilation. Wonder how much of
the iron rail, if any, exists today?) Eventually one hundred and sixty
pounds was collected for the erection of a monument on the site of the
famous tree, but the memorial was eventually erected at Darwin. The
site of the Trees, Stuart's Point, is seventy-five to eighty miles
easterly from Darwin, in swampy and thick jungly country, which no doubt
accounted for the initial failures to locate them.7

When well into Van Diemen Gulf, the boys became excited on observing smoke signals from Melville Island off to starboard. "What for him yabber?" enquired Captain Alf of the boys. "Jo-coober" (Joe Cooper, the Melville Island buffalo shooting king): "Him want yabber longa Ca-bann." Alf was of course an old mate and associate of Alf [Joe] Cooper's. The Essington was turned a few points in the direction of the smoke yabber. The tide being at near high, moreover comparatively deep close to steeply shelving beaches and low red cliffs, the schooner was able to get in close to the shoreline. Had it been a low lying mangrove mud flat, a chance landing could be very difficult, particularly at low tide, when the water sometimes receded and left flat bare mud, sometimes for miles.

Joe Cooper somewhat resembled Alf Brown, for though he had experienced a most colourful career, he didn't look that type of a man at all. Medium build and anything but portly, Joe was a quiet man, wearing a greying black beard. The Lads reckoned him well enough past middle-age. His permanent camp was over the other side of the island, the Mates learnt, near the southern entrance to Apsley Strait, dividing the two islands of Melville and Bathurst. Apparently the not so long established Catholic Mission on Bathurst Island could be seen across the strait from Joe's camp.

Joe was out on the "run" doing some shooting on the eastern side of the island when Alf's well-known boat was sighted, and it appeared he wanted a lift to Darwin: hence the S.O.S. smoke yabber. Joe's temporary

camp came into view only a few hundred yards off amidst a clump of trees, and his helpers, a dozen or more of the island boys, were lounging about or nonchalantly attending to the job of pegging out, drying and packing etc., buffalo hides; and a few horses were grazing about, some of them looking capable enough. The blacks were a fine looking lot, most of them quite naked. They were all staring hard at the strangers, and vice versa from the Essington people. The Lads noticed most of the island boys grew full but somewhat trimmed beards, with the upper lip shaved bare: a tribal custom that made them look rather odd.

A large, manned dugout canoe had been bartering barramundi and other sea tucker with Joe Cooper's boys, and they now got a job ferrying the Lads ashore, the while the two old-timers Alf and Joe were busy with the dinghy. So the Mates had an interesting look around the buffalo shooter's camp, and dearly hoped Joe could delay the voyage for a day or two to allow them a chance of joining the hunters in a buff. shoot. Nothing doing, both Alf and Joe were anxious to be off straight away. However, Joe's boys presented the Lads with some buffalo steak and other bush tucker, for which they were given the usual vile tobacco and two tins of jam. Later on board the Essington the crew boys cooked the bush tucker and made a good job of it, including baking and roasting cabbage tree palm, lily roots and goose eggs. The cabbage tree and lily roots were particularly appetising. The poor Abos were genuinely pleased that the whites, including the Lads in particular, enjoyed their bush tucker and cooking.

During the run to Darwin, Joe Cooper was persuaded by Alf to bear his old spear wound. It was a terrible scar, very deep. Joe Cooper could tell the voyagers little about the war, the great tragic struggle that had now been in progress a few weeks, over the other side of the world.
However, Joe had learnt from an intelligent Bathurst Island Mission boy who had just happened along on a walkabout, that there had been continuous very heavy fighting, with appalling casualties on either side. The Essington company had half expected to learn that the war was, or near enough, all over (poor fools!).

Joe didn't seem much concerned about the war. But one thing he did seem to be sure of: "Anybody who volunteered to go away and fight in a war that was none of our business, was looking for trouble." Old-timer Alf seemed to agree with him. But then, they were old, thought Young Bill. Long Jonsey was strictly neutral.8

Palmerston Club Hotel, c.1911: "The lads put up at the Club Hotel along with their new mates."
(Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Australia.)

Adelaide River Siding: "... the railway dining room come boarding house was also a sly grog shop."
Chapter 27

THE NORTH BEGINS TO STIR

And so the Mates arrived back at Darwin after a tour round the Territory of some seven months. The trip from Borroloola had taken over three weeks. It was now September. "Big things to come" had gathered momentum during the Lads' absence, and now it was bandied about that a big mob of men were shortly to arrive from the South to start clearing the jungle away for the proposed huge meatworks, and "it was fair dinkum too", everybody affirmed. Some of the building material had already been unloaded at the wharf and was stored in the railway sheds, and so on!

The Mates had decided to run down to the Adelaide River per "Leaping Leena" (train) and have a look at the "Long" and "Nuggety" Jacks' buff. shooting show.¹ Adelaide River railway station and township was some eighty miles south of Darwin, on the Adelaide River. The line continued south to the terminus at Pine Creek some one hundred and fifty miles south of Darwin, and a further extension of some forty miles was under construction to the Katherine River. The Mates found it an insignificant enough township, no pub, at least not licensed. However, the railway dining room come boarding house was also a sly grog shop. A

¹Cf. Lavender's account of buffalo shooting in the Top End with Warburton's Buffaloes, passim.
few semi-official railway or government-owned corrugated iron domiciles,
some wretched settlers' huts and camps and quite a few "fly blown" Abos
seemed to make up the "township". There was also a store and post
office, of course.

The Lads established themselves at the boarding house, dumping the
gear they had brought along (saddles, including a pack, and their rifles
etc.) on the verandah outside their bedroom door. Bert, the boarding
house "boss", a chummy sort of fellow much addicted to the bottle,
guaranteed to hunt up three or four suitable horses for them. Train
days, once a fortnight each way, were booze-up days apparently, for the
railway sidings along the way. It was certainly booze-up night at
Adelaide River, grog being clandestinely purchased by the bottle from
the local store and boarding house at twice the price in Darwin. The
Mates imbibed more than usual, if only to make a popular impression with
the locals(!?). The Abos hung about on the fringe of the various
drinking groups, and were grateful for occasional small favours. And
over at the blacks' camp fires came the continual sound of corroboree to
the usual accompaniment of tapping boomerangs, kylie sticks, or just
bare bashing of thighs. Apparently a little strong drink had even found
its way to the corroboree fires.

The Lads were mounted and on the track once more. A packhorse and
spare followed, and a couple of the local boys walked smartly in front
to guide the strangers through some areas of dense bush and jungle to
the Jacks' shooting country. In the pack was some mail and a few up to
weeks old newspapers for the shooters. A few bottles of rum and whisky
was also in the packs. It appears the buff shooting lease took in part
of minor creeks and rivers between the Adelaide and Mary Rivers.

The Mates were informed at the railway siding that it "wasn't so far
to the camp (or camps - they shifted about) as the crow flies, but you'll probably travel some fifty miles to get there." The dry was pretty well advanced by this time, and rank growth was everywhere and commencing to dry off. The Lads soon realised they could even be bushed in the tall reed and cane grass, and mentally blessed their guides, often. Cattle and horses were encountered at times, and directly a few buffs were disturbed, mostly scampering into cover. Odd ones stared the intruders out or were inclined to approach challengingly, especially the bulls. The riders had their rifles ready, but saved the shooting until later.

This was the first time the Mates had traversed the real northern jungle, and realised it had to be experienced to be believed: the density at times of the tropical growth, the overhead covering often blocking out the sunlight and creating an atmosphere of semi-darkness, and except for the faint track winding in and out and around, the environment being somewhat awe-inspiring, if the imagination was given free enough rein and allowed to dwell on what would happen if one got off the track and became bushed, etc., etc.. The Lads agreed they had been wise after all in that they had hung on to the pocket compass purchased in Townsville many months previously, but never really used. In future it would always be carried handy in the likes of negotiating this jungle country (the Mates resolved).

There were all sorts of birds in the more open going, and several huge scrub turkey mounds were passed in the thick scrubs. Marsupials abounded, and a few odd wild pigs. The boys wanted to display their prowess at collecting turkey eggs, sugarbag and other bush tucker, but the tourists were anxious to push on, and they had an idea the boys might decide to clear off home. Incidentally, they had planted their rags where they could be picked up on their return to the siding, and
were quite naked. There were Johnston River 'gators in the lagoons, and
the boys explained there may even be an odd old man croc. (the larger
man-eating type) in the larger and deeper lagoons, which come up-river
during the wet and big tides, and eventually became stranded in the dry.
The boys warned that it would be wise to always be careful of such
strays. Every once in a while there was a tragedy through somebody
being careless of this danger, and often enough horses and cattle were
dragged to their doom, caught whilst carelessly drinking. Overnight
camps were pitched in clear patches and well away from big waterholes.

The weather was getting warmer, and the pests that came with the
summer - flies, mosquitos, ants, snakes and sandflies - were beginning
to become a nuisance. Walkabout blacks, half myalls, were contacted and
sometimes fraternised with, and occasionally a white man. Apparently
the travellers were continually passing through leased grazing country,
but there were no boundary fences. Excepting a small home paddock and
set of yards adjacent to a lonely homestead hut, viewed occasionally,
there was little signs of settlement.

The third day out from the Adelaide siding (the first being a short
day), more open country was crossed between the Adelaide and Mary
Rivers, and many buffalo carcasses were passed lying about bearing
witness to the shooters' activities, and they were not a pretty sight.
But this was only one of the objectionable phases that apparently went
with the game, and the Lads learnt there were other repulsive aspects.

Hereabouts, at the boys' intimation, a patch of bamboo scrub was set
alight and in no time a dense cloud of smoke ascended, accompanied by
thousands of loud reports, same being countless bamboo nodes bursting
under the heat. The boys became excited and wanted to hunt the various
game fleeing before the flames, and the Lads' authority was well tested
in calling them to heel. In due course, an answering smoke went up from
the shooters, only a few miles off. The Mates knew they would be
expected. The shooters would have been warned of course, by the usual
bush telegraph.

[They] arrived at the camp about sundown, and were made tremendously
welcome. The Jacks were genuinely pleased to greet the Lads once more.
A big shavoo that night. The hard tack brought out from the siding was
opened up amidst great gusto, and before the night was finished the camp
supply was also broached. Several bottles were cleaned up that night,
enough to make everybody from just happy to roaring drunk, even
including, to a degree, the blacks. The latter (and the Jacks had a
following including hangers-on, relatives with their gins and
piccaninnies etc., of about forty overall) put on a ding-dong
corroboree.

The "fame" of "B'roarer" (bullroarer) and "Didgee" (didgeridoo) — Long
Jonsey and Young Bill respectively — had spread across the Territory
from the Victoria River to the local blacks, and the Mates were hailed
almost as a couple of Dreamtime heroes come to life. The mouth organs
were played to no end, and both visitors when happily drunk enough sang
and played in turn. Bill was handed the didgeridoo and Harry Jones the
bullroarer, and the hilarity of the coloured company was tremendous.
Later came the camel riding farce per corroboree, and the two guests
were just in the mood to join in. As the Jacks later remarked, the
whites went one hundred per cent combo (turned nigger) that night.

The party broke up about piccaninny daylight. Odd ones of the boys
went a little mad at times (what with a smell of exceedingly strong
tack) and had to be restrained, even to the extent of being forcibly
held until quietening down, and at least one fellow who wouldn't listen
to reason was tapped on the head with a nulla-nulla (just hard enough), which had the desired effect. No shooting the following day: too many sore heads. Long Jack throughout the day weighed out just enough grog from remaining stock to tone down the ordeal of recovery from the wild night, but only included an indispensible boy or two. The great majority of the blacks just had to get over it as best they could without any pick-me-up.

The Jacks had heard the Mates had got on with Herb Cuthbert's mob, but couldn't get over the fact of their having got over so much country in the few months since arriving in the North, declaring the Lads had apparently seen more of the Territory in a few months than some old-timers had experienced in a lifetime. And the Mates came to realise in time they had moved around some, although in practice it didn't seem anything out of the ordinary at the time.

Shooting was resumed the following day, and the Jacks well looked the part: two typical Territory buffalo shooters in full dress, well enough mounted on valuable trained to the split second shooting horses, and armed with old cavalry repeating carbines. Ammunition was carried per cartridge belt. Rough bush clothes (not necessarily riding breeches and short concertina leggings etc.), but every bushman wore an old felt slouch hat. The umpteen gallon American sombrero so popular in later years had not then appeared in the North, probably arrived later with the Second World War and the Yanks.

The following day the visitors tagged along behind the Jacks, riding the shooters' number two trained mounts and carrying ordinary .303 military rifles, considered the best weapon for the occasion as the handlers had used them plenty, and the Mates would just get the feel of the running shoot for that day. The trained mounts (of necessity keenly
intelligent animals) soon caught on with the idea, and kept well clear in the rear without overdue "pulling". On a couple of occasions a finishing shot or two had to be administered to buffs regaining their legs, a dangerous enough job, as there is no more dangerous animal in the world than a wounded buffalo. However, being covered by two rifles, they were finished off before developing a dangerous charging position.

There were mobs of hundreds of buffalos, and the Jacks' well-trained horses, at the instigation of their riders (the herd of course being first stampeded), positioned themselves alongside a selected bull buff. (the bulls being selected for the obvious reason of perpetuating the herd) close enough for the rider to reach over with extended arm clutching carbine pistol-grip fashion, and firing when the muzzle of same was literally touching the buff. in the small of the back. At the report the shooter's horse (well-trained for the game) instantly veered outward to avoid the swinging victim's horns, but if the shot was well placed, and it generally was, the buff. collapsed immediately, mortally wounded. On this occasion the Lads were allowed to finish them off, and it could be a dangerous enough job, the wounded and maddened animal occasionally regaining its legs for a while. But by usual routine, the poor buffs were left to die in agony, as it suited the "skinning" blacks to tackle their work whilst hot and fresh. A repulsively cruel method, but it was a hard, cruel game, and like the famous Diggers later in the then current war, men became hard and callous and much brutalised.

It was straight away noticed that Long Jack worked the near side, shooting with the right hand, whilst his mate worked on the off side and shot left-handed. This could have been quite a problem for the Mates, but happily Harry was used to positioning on the off side with cattle, and could swing the stockwhip as well with the left hand as the right. So Young Bill was thankful when his mate automatically (as it were) took up position on the off side.
A second stampede (a repeat of the first) was followed up later in the afternoon with a fresh lot of buffs, and as over twenty had been bowled over, the Jacks decided to call it a day. Addressing the two hangers-on, they were advised, "You blokes can please yourselves about tomorrow, but it could be a good idea to play along same as today and get a bit more feel of the game before the dinkum stuff." Same advice was willingly taken and the recipients were pleased enough to note the old champions were still willing to eventually give them a go.

The following day the Lads were advised to take the two spare carbines and to "be ready for the kick, and make your pistol-grip hold not too tight, nor too loose." The shorter carbines were easier handled, but the kick was there all right, both amateurs losing their weapons altogether once or twice. Not so embarrassing from their position well behind the herd, but the victims were later the butt of much chattering and laughable joking, the boys in particular enjoying it immensely. Of course, the Mates had to at least pretend to take it in good part, both stoutly denying having lost their carbines and accusing each other of the shame of same. However, both eventually admitted to their pistol-grip hands "being a bit sore and even a little bruised." "Shoot off plenty," advised the Jacks, "you've just got to get used to it, but mind, have a bit of pity on us poor b------ out in front."

Well toward the end of the day, an occurrence happened to cause the amateur shooters to realise there was real danger in the game, and came as a reminder to be ready for any such emergency. A big bull unexpectedly and quickly rose to its feet and immediately charged at Young Bill and his mount. For a long terrifying second the rider panicked and was about to turn tail and gallop off, thought better of it, and instinctively firing from the shoulder, got a fair shot in at the broad head and heard it smack on bone loud enough to knock a
mountain over. The buff momentarily faltered, shook its head, and came on for more. However, Jock knew the ropes well enough to anticipate his rider's pull on the rein, and swerving quickly was in full gallop in a split second. At the same time Harry Jones got in three quick shots (from the shoulder) into the buff, back from the wither in the region of the heart. He fell heavily in a heap, quivered a few seconds, then lay still. Incidentally, Harry just had time to notice Jock was definitely gaining on the buff. The danger of Young Bill being charged down was over.

Checking up afterwards, the bull had stopped one near the small of the back, one near centre on the forehead, and Harry's three shots in its side, the latter nicely enough placed: showed just how much punishment a buffalo can take. The Mates felt pleased the incident had happened. It put them right on their guard and they realised how quickly they would have to think and act in such an emergency, and the extent to which trained horses could be relied on. Young Bill felt a bit shaky, he'd had a fright.

As it happened, the Jacks saw the whole show and actually commended the Lads on the procedure taken. "Couldn't have done much else," they declared. Had Bill's "shot got him in the curl (dead centre) he'd have dropped him for good. Too risky! Have a shot for the curl by all means if you feel sure of plenty of time and room to get away, otherwise gallop off immediately and your mount will manoeuvre to give you plenty of chances for shooting from side-on or the rear, as usual."

Another day or two at the "tagging on" procedure and then came the real thing, buff shooting in earnest. Young Bill accompanied Long Jack and worked on the near side quarter, Harry Jones and Nuggety Jack working the off side. The lads didn't feel over nervous at all, because
of the preceding routine followed, they reckoned. Bill didn't feel that fussy about getting too close up to the buff. for a start, but his trained mount saw to it and generally moved in close enough for anything. Apparently the galloping buff didn't take that much notice of an overtaking rider until rudely shocked from the result of the shot. Anything could happen then, but even that was eventually taken calmly. Anyhow, very seldom anything did happen: the horses knew the ropes too well, and the amateur shooter[s] very soon settled down into the routine.

The Mates were now "riding on top of the world" and "wouldn't call the governor their uncle!!" "This was the game!" they declared, "it'll be right on directly after the coming wet." Anything from fifteen to thirty buffs were now shot daily, and time raced by. The Mates were apparently considered good company by the Jacks, and the niggers were always pleased at a skylarking joke. The Jacks reckoned, "Yes," the Lads "should give the shooting a go, but don't let it get into yer blood. We've been shooting for years and are no better off than when we started," they declared. "The wise move in this North is to get hold of a lump of country and settle for cattle. And you blokes can do it. You're well suited as mates and now's the time whilst you're young."

The older men made no bones about regretting "not having taken the move themselves years ago, instead of sticking at this lousy game. There's nothing in it but hard irksome work once the novelty wears off. Yes, you fellows think it's a great game now, but the enthusiasm will be gone after the first season's shoot. Hard drinking seems to go with the game too, and you can't stick it for years without going over 'combo' sometimes."

Reviewing the Jacks' advice in retrospect after all these years, it was good advice well meant, and the Lads had already settled, for what
it was worth, along those lines. The plan was practical and sound enough under the circs, the greatest drawback being the inducement in time (as the Jacks had commented) of turning combo. The loneliness and acute isolation from the civilisation they had been used to and appreciated as very young men, was frightening to contemplate (but this phase of outback life has already been well "discussed" and described). Suffice it to repeat the danger of turning combo was always there, and the great majority of "battling" settlers fell to "marrying" Aboriginal or coloured women, who generally bore them a large family. But it was very seldom a success in the long run. The law eventually stepped in and no union of that nature was recognised. The progeny were eventually gathered into the missions in many cases, and in time newcomers to the North were more and [more] wont to ostracise such a union. Many a hardy and better deserving settler in his advancing years became very lonely and bitter as his home and family, such as they were, just simply disintegrated.

And so two or three weeks went by, and the Lads knew they must make the break if their welcome was not to be worn thin. In any case, the shooting was just about finished for the season. There was another wild night to celebrate the parting, stocks for same being renewed from the Adelaide wharf and depot some forty miles off northerly, where a lugger periodically dumped stores from Darwin, and took on the buff. hides that strings of packhorses had carried in over the previous weeks. The last the Mates saw of the camp, three or four of the Old People (and they were poor old things of both sexes) actually began cutting their heads and torso, and as the blood began to flow the Jacks were determinedly remonstrating with them, absolutely forbidding it. The Lads pressed on and the jungle swallowed them up.

About mid-November back in Darwin, the long expected Vesteys men,
about a hundred of them, arrived from the South, as a matter of fact from Sydney. They were a very mixed lot, but mostly young and single. There was a very rough element amongst them, impregnated with I.W.W. principles (Industrial Workers of the World: the then equivalent of the extreme left wing "Commos" of today), irresponsible people (many of them imported) whose principles were, in the vernacular, "Up all workers of the world and unite, and to hell with employers and capitalism," and they carried out their policy vigorously and unceasingly. Too vigorous: they were the predecessors of the faction who about the time of the close of the second and beginning of the following decade of the century, rioted and "mutinied", virtually besieging Administrator Dr Gilruth (and his staff) for a while in his own Residency. But it was the beginning of the end. They had pursued their extremist policy too far, eventually causing all business enterprise and progress to become top heavy and over capitalised, which winding up with the prevailing general depression, stifled all development for the following two or three decades.

The Lads, at a loose end pending the duration of the wet season, joined the newcomers and the first clearing of the jungle was started some two or three miles out of the town: the site where the huge

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2 Vesteys began constructing meatworks in Darwin in 1914. See Introduction, Ch.5, p.76.

3 See Introduction, Ch.5, p.77. "The Darwin Rebellion" took place in December 1918, following several years of antagonism between Gilruth and the Territory trade union movement. Lavender may have read A. Grenfell Price's account, The History and Problems of the Northern Territory, Australia, (A.E. Acott, Adelaide, 1930), which is very critical of labor's role. See also Powell, Far Country, pp.153-60; Douglas Lockwood, The Front Door. Darwin, 1869-1969, (Rigby, Adelaide, 1968), pp.189-215.
meatworks was to be built. Vesteys had secured extensive accommodation for their employees, taking over from the Administration new buildings (of a sort) some mile and a half out of the town and right on the railway line, which had been built to accommodate the anticipated new settlers as they arrived, in the interim of their settling on the land. As usual the scheme fell through (along with the master overall development plan), the settlers (other than a mere dribble who cleared off south again within a year or two) just failed to materialise. Only part of the millions sterling that was poured down the drain in the latest scheme to attract population to the North!

Not much work was done, individually, in Vesteys' jungle, and some of the "workers" just got lost and lay about reading and yarning all day, and for many days. The work was uninteresting and boring, and time fairly dragged. Every other day a stop-work meeting seemed to automatically materialise (instigated of course by the minority extremist faction, and nobody dared to say anything against them, they were a tough ruthless lot!) whilst certain ways and means were discussed, the outcome being new demands on the employers for more and more money and better conditions, and same just had to be granted. Then the wet came down fairly suddenly, and the humidity, mosquitoes, sandflies and other pests made life trying enough.

Every few nights the extremist faction would arrive at camp (an immense corrugated iron shed which served as a common bedroom) in the middle of the night, mostly drunk, and as they finished more beer the empty bottles were deliberately flung on the concrete floor and loudly smashed into fragments. Then they would start firing their revolvers into the air, the bullets piercing the iron roof and walls. Anybody who dared to complain was horribly abused and threatened.
One morning the police turned up at the camp and demanded everyone (because of the circs described) hand over their revolvers for safekeeping for the time being. One of the rowdy faction leaders who had not complied with the police request (a fat and coarse Londoner who was always addressed as "Cock"), when approached by the police sergeant (a benign enough man to all appearances) and who demanded he, Cock, open up his port for inspection, turned out to be an annoying "bush lawyer". "Fair enough," said Cock, in a hard, defiant voice, "show us your warrant." The police sergeant tried to explain he didn't require one, but apparently Cock knew better, and told him, "Don't you dare open my bag without a warrant, there'll be trouble if you do." The policeman knew he was beaten, Cock won, his revolver was in the port, and he calmly removed same after the Law's departure. Years later Young Bill saw his picture in the press, accompanied by a paragraph all about him. He was then a big man of a union in a western New South Wales mining town: he would be! The sergeant also remarked to Cock, "Your master has informed me you have a small firearm, where is it?" Cock immediately exploded, "What are you talking about, my master. No man's my master. I suppose you mean my employer," and so on. By this time the poor old sergeant was looking somewhat embarrassed and broke off the interview. However, he collected many six-shooters for temporary safekeeping. Incidentally, the Mates collected theirs back (all four of them) just before sailing south.

Shortly before Christmas an overseas steamer arrived loaded with rails for the extension of the railway from Pine Creek to the Katherine. Wharf labourers were wanted and anything for a change, the lads hurried to be in on the new job. The pay was well over a pound a day, a little better than Vesteys' job, but the change of environment was what was badly needed. The Mates shifted camp to a boarding house up the town,
run by black goatee-bearded Pearce, the chap, it might be remembered, who was trying to organise an armed party into Arnhem Land (he was still trying).

Shortly before this the Lads had bid farewell to the Jacks, getting aboard the Montoro (Burns Philp and Co.) just about happily "molo", and bound for Melbourne. Much handshaking was indulged in, the older men assuring the intending young buff. shooters of all the help in the world on their return after the wet. Apparently they had been a little late ("as usual", they explained) in pulling out of "their country". The wet had actually started. In the end, had a bit of a job getting out at all. Like many good mates met whilst "knocking about" throughout the outback those days, "they came, and they passed on". The Lads later dropped them a card or two from the front, but no replies were forthcoming. They learnt as the war dragged on, that buff. shooting had waned on account of the world upheaval, and the Jacks had laid up their plant and gone off to Western Australia for a change. The Mates often spoke of them with admiration, and regrets.

The wharfies could be compared to the Vesteys crowd, as Ned Kelly in comparison to a goodie-goodie old sis: they were the roughest and toughest crowd that the Lads had ever associated with. One had to be carefully tactful not to say a word out of place for fear of being tossed off the wharf to the sharks and alligators. The work of course should have been heavy, but all hands saw to it that it was made as easy (and boring) as possible.

The ships' officers were also required to be very tactful with the wharfies. One day a grumpy old captain dared to offer advice (no doubt at least helpful). Cock and his merry men were also now amongst the wharfies, and Cock ordered the ship's captain to "get to hell and boss
A photograph sent by "Young Bill" to his brother Eric. A note on the back reads:

P.O. Port Darwin
Northern Tetry.
3:1:15

What do you think of this photo. We look a pretty desperate lot, don't we? My rifle is a 32 repeater, that I bought on "Tower-Hill". I'm afraid it's too small for this country. What do you think of my chum Harry? (holding whip)

"Young Bill" is at bottom right.
your bloody niggers about," or much worse language, some reckoned. Incidentally, the ship's crew were coloured men from India. Believe the captain turned very red and angry, but he just had to take it. The Lads did not witness this incident, but everybody knew it did actually happen.

On another occasion during night shift whilst working on other than a rail ship, the steamer's first officer, a fiery fellow that could have been a Scotsman, spoke to the gang down in the ship's hole, civilly enough Young Bill thought at the time (he and Jonsey were in a railway truck on the wharf). The gang below gave back some untoward lip and were asked what they were talking about. More lip! The first mate (or first officer) immediately and alone, climbed down the ladders to two or three decks below, arriving there with his back to several rough and tough wharfies who were in a sulky mood. The mate faced the gang and asked in no uncertain tones, "Now, what's it all about?" The leader (who happened to be the wharfies' representative) kept on leisurely working and remarked in a conciliatory tone (in effect), "Well! can't you take a bit of fun, nobody meant any harm?!" The mate was content to let it go at that, and moderating his tone remarked, "That's all right!" The Lads reckoned "that ship's officer was game enough to say the least, even though a bit hot-headed."

Occasionally a wharfies' meeting was held in the local open-air picture show. One Saturday afternoon at a meeting with not a few happily "half molo", too many wanted to speak, and for too long. The rowdies (the extreme leftists) were demanding the most ridiculous "rights", and their professional "Organiser" Ted Nelson (who later became the Territory's first parliamentary (Federal) representative) informed the rowdies, "No, I can't take that seriously, it's too bloody silly, too hot altogether," and so on. He was immediately hauled over
the coals by the rowdies as a "pussy-footing butter-fingered old woman," etc., etc.. Ted, a light-built man with a reasonable demeanour, was nevertheless tough enough when necessary, and without losing his head. He stuck to his guns and shut the rowdies up by winding up with, "If you don't like my point of view, you've got your remedy. I won't take this matter up, it's too silly." But Ted was in no danger at all of losing his job.

Occasionally both sharks and alligators were seen around the wharf. A big old man 'gator often surfaced around the same spot sometimes for quite a while, basking like a log on the warm surface water some three hundred yards from the wharf, and of course there were others. But they were too cunning to expose themselves near the wharf; they had often been shot at. It is hardly conceivable, but an odd wharfie would now and again dive in off the steps and swim around for a few seconds. Of course they didn't know the danger they were running, and wouldn't be told, but Young Bill could never bear to watch them. Christmas and New Year 1914-15 came and went, and the wet settled down in earnest. It would just simply pour for anything up to a fortnight, and then several comparatively dry days and the sun would come out. Then the humidity was depressing.

All hands, one after the other, were going down like ninepins with dengue fever. The Mates were amongst the last to succumb, Harry first. They reckoned heavy doses of quinine kept them on their feet for a long time, although it made them very listless and headachey. Harry was no good for two or three weeks, and then it was Bill's turn. He knew he was in for it at last. Finishing up a night shift on a periodically calling Burns Philp steamer, he could hardly drag himself up the very many steps cut in rock "near cliffs" up to the town. What do you know! thought Young Bill. To think that when he was well, he often out of
sheer youthful exuberance and perhaps a little skite, took these steps two or three at a time, and on the run. However, he took them very steadily this particular morning, and on reaching camp just managed to wash and change (incidentally, all water being labouriously drawn from a deep well in rear of the boarding house) and collapsed on his bunk without bothering about breakfast. Harry Jones, who wasn't quite over the doing he went through, laughed and laughed every time he looked at his mate lying out to it.

And there Bill lay for a few days it seemed, without eating anything, but taking a little quinine now and again when his mate insisted. It was very seldom thought necessary to call the town doctor in, and then it was invariably found to be a case of straight out malaria fever, and a case of off to hospital. All the time (except when sleeping), Bill could hear the rain pelting onto the nearby corrugated iron walls and roof, and the sound actually lulled and comforted him. But pretty well everyone had been down with the dengue, and the few that hadn't went down just the same later: it was taken for granted. It was a mild form of malaria fever and came and went like an epidemic every summer.

And so the wet season dragged on. The Mates were pretty well over the dengue, but going through the aftermath depression stage, and in a way it was worse, the weather and inactivity in consequence of same adding to the intense boredom. Young Bill, who had been chewing over the idea for months, now made his mind up overnight: get away for the war as quickly as practicable, and there may still be enough fighting left to at least get a trip away from Australia, and even catch up with some active service before it was all over. What an experience to talk about, thought Bill! Harry wasn't a bit interested: "This will be the parting of the ways, perhaps for all time." He used all sorts of arguments to get Bill to change his mind. "What about our buff.
shooting in a few weeks' time, and the lump of country we're taking up for cattle?" and so on. Young Bill assured his mate it would be right on just the same, after the war. (Strange! He was young enough to have no doubts that whatever happened, he would be coming back alright.) "You're a big mug anyhow, Bill," continued Harry, "sticking your head out for trouble, it's not Australia's war anyhow," etc., etc.. But Bill was determined, and what was more he suspected his mate of weakening, and in the end he was proved right, the latter after a few days suddenly remarking, "Well, alright b----- yer, I'm with you." Bill was not surprised, but he was very pleased.

With something like a fortnight to go before the next steamer going south called, the mates had plenty of time to get rid of their bit of plant, horses, saddles, firearms etc.. Harry was a good salesman and the casual arrivals from the south, especially the newcomers, were good customers with plenty of cash, and they'd buy anything connected with the Territory, especially droving and buffalo shooting gear, revolvers and rifles in particular. In the end there wasn't much left for the usual second-hand dealer: they were hard men anyway. However, the lads expected just then to be buying them back, as it were, perhaps in only a few months' time (although Bill hoped it would be much longer), and they reckoned when getting a plant together again, as buyers, they would be much tougher than the purchasers they were then dealing with. Fair enough, they reckoned!

The south-bound steamer was the old Aldenham, one of the very few clipper-bowed steamers afloat apparently, of some six or seven thousand tons (far as Old Bill can remember), Japanese stewards and East Indies
coloured crew, European and Australian officered. The Mates had a pleasant enough ten days' voyage to Sydney, the latter chosen as Bill was anxious to see his people again after an absence from home of four and a half years. He'd "skedaddled" from home just after turning sixteen, and he was twenty and a half on reaching Sydney once more. First thing that occurred to him on arriving back in that locality, the harbour seemed much smaller and distances much shorter than what he thought he remembered them to be, the usual impression, he later confirmed, when the young return to their native stamping grounds after an absence of a few years.

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AS LAVENDER: "That an experience to talk about, fought Bill!"

HARRY JONES: "Southern Irishman and loyal Sinn Fenian."
Chapter 28

EPILOGUE: "FAIR ENOUGH!"

Harry had to go into hospital for three or four weeks for removal of varicose veins and other complications, and during this time came the famous Anzac Landing on the Gallipoli Peninsula, Turkey. To Bill's disappointment, it was an infantry operation, and the Light Horse (which the Mates were hoping to join) were not used and apparently not likely to be so at least for some time, owing to the very rugged hilly and ridgy nature of the country. But the infantry was "copping it" and casualties were heavy. More and more infantry would be wanted, as fast as they could be shipped away. The general opinion of the young fellows in camp and expecting to be was, if one was anxious to get away, join the infantry. If not so fussy about a trip overseas, go for the Light Horse. The poor Light Horse the Mates met around the city seemed very downhearted, most of them, and some expressed themselves as "sorry they hadn't had the infantry on". If they had, they would have "got away weeks ago". As it was, they'd "been in camp for months, and it looked as if they might never get away", and so on. Harry was not a bit worried about not getting away. He would join the Light Horse or nothing at all, but Bill was very keen to be off, and like the great majority of patriotic young fellows of those days, hoped he wouldn't be too late to join in the "dinkum thing". (Poor fellow, he had nothing to worry about on that score. Many times during the following four years he would have sold out very cheap indeed.)
The young fellows of today on going to a war, have been thoroughly educated, many of their fathers and elderly family connections having gone through one or other of the two World Wars, or the Korean War. There has also, since the 1914-18 War, been a flood of realistic literature on the subject, ready to hand. It is impossible, perhaps, for the abovementioned young people to understand the extent of the ignorance on the subject (what to expect of direct contact with modern war) of their counterparts prior to the First World War, half a century ago. British troops, much less Australians (other than in some comparatively minor phases of the Boer War) had not yet fought amidst modern war conditions and environment.

The young people of over half a century ago, what with the narrow patriotic nationalism then encouraged in the schools, were taught (almost inculcated) that the British were the bravest people in the world, and same had been confirmed every time they went into battle. (Incidentally, the writer still believes the British race taken all round as regards toughness and tenacity, in the ordeal of battle or out of it, are at least second to none in the world.) But today it has long been realised that all breeds can be brave, sometimes very much so. Then again, half a century back lads remembered their school history (as mentioned), including the declarations of famous British fighting men: "War was the spice of life"; it "was a thrilling and glorious experience"; "My own country right or wrong", and so on. What the lads of those days were thoroughly ignorant about was that all wars were a horrible messy business, cruel, and a truly terrible experience, especially if by missing out on death, wounds or illness, it necessitated facing up to the frighteningly terrible ordeal of just one nerve-wrecking bloodbath after another. One who has endured this experience comes to realise all men are brave, and some are braver than
others. No man is one hundred per cent hero. Sometimes he is very frightened although he may not show it, and no soldier is all coward (a very much misused word, and a "dirty" one!). In battle the most frightened man (and of course generally, putting it in the idiom of the First A.I.F., "he hadn't exactly nothing to be nervous about") the most frightened man has some spark of the hero in his makeup. As an active (1914–18 War) author "Sapper" wrote of this question: "Many a man has earned a Victoria Cross, with nothing to his credit except that he never ran away." Very aptly put, the writer submits. And so the difference: the young fellow of today is perfectly aware of the ordeal he will be up against when he goes to war, but the boys of fifty years ago had been taught to look forward to it as a picnic trip and a very interesting experience. What a disillusion later! Hence the latters' enthusiasm to be off to the war.

During Harry's convalescence, the Lads ran out to the big camp at Liverpool for a "look see". Bill was thrilled when he witnessed battalions of the Fifth Brigade, Second Division, well turned out and ready for departure for the war, march smartly into camp after a route march with the bands playing "Where are the boys of the Old Brigade, steadily and shoulder to shoulder", and it was all very stirring to Young Bill. And then and there his mind was made up: he would enlist in the infantry and get away as soon as possible. But Harry was adamant about the Light Horse: "Foot slogging was a mug's game." So with regrets the two mates settled for that.

Bill got away soon enough, leaving an unworried Harry Jones in camp, and expecting to be for some time. At that Bill's reinforcement group, the "Sixth Reinforcement to the First Battalion" (about one hundred and fifty men), were in camp at Liverpool about a month only, and thence off on the transport Caroola via the Great Australian Bight and Fremantle,
Aden on the South Arabian coast where they were to land and help defend the "Base" against hostile Turk-led Arabs of Arabia, who then were only some miles out of Aden. However, after a few hours in that harbour it was apparently considered the position did not warrant the troops landing, and they were off again. Next call was the port of Suez, in Egypt, on the north-west coast of the Red Sea, and here the troops were disembarked after about four weeks at sea. Thence train to Illiopolis, still in Egypt. Then just a fortnight's more training and a look at the Pyramids and Sphinx etc. Most of the Caroola's troops took part along with many hundreds of others in the infamous "Second Battle of the Wazzer": their first "battle" (another story!).

They embarked the following day at Alexandria on the Mediterranean coast of Egypt, and then a few days' steaming to Lemnos Island (a Greek island taken over by the Allies as a base for the Dardanelles operations). Thence to the Anzac position on Gallipoli, Turkey, landing on the night of 5-6 August 1915. Five p.m. the following day (the sixth) was the "hop over" at Lone Pine (Bill's brigade, the First, taking a prominent part in that stubborn and bloody battle), our Hero's first bloodbath, after approximately ten weeks of training (including some five weeks at sea): must be a near record for scanty training of raw recruits, but again, that is another story!

Harry got a trip away sooner than expected, the Light Horse in the meantime having left their horses in Egypt and landed on Gallipoli to fight as infantrymen. The mates saw a little of each other on "Gallip", (until Harry was invalided away suffering badly with dysentery) and back in Egypt after "The Evacuation", and corresponded regularly enough throughout the war, Harry's unit, the Seventh Light Horse, seeing it out against the German-led Turks in Sinai, Palestine and Syria, and Bill of course went to France with the infantry.
The Lavender Home (nearest camera), Wentworthville.

The Lavender Family, c.1919.
Nina, Cyril, Roy, Tasman
George, Eric, Esther
Well! Their plans to get back to the Northern Territory after the War didn't eventuate. Harry visited his native stamping ground at Waterford, Southern Ireland, during the Armistice of 1918-19, still in uniform of course (and it suited him well). Catching up on an old sweetheart of his youth, he became engaged. He came back to Australia for his discharge, where Bill in the meantime had become interested in settling on the land down in the Riverina with two of his brothers (Cyril and Roy) who were also returned soldiers.

Eventually the Mates parted happily enough, Harry going back to Ireland and marriage. The future Mrs Harry Jones' father was a Master Butcher with two or three shops, and as the Master Butcher's future son-in-law was also by early apprenticing an M.B., he of course took over the management of one of the shops. No doubt under the circumstances he eventually took over all the shops.

Bill was very happy to take up land with his brothers out at Barellan in the Riverina, where he grew wheat, wool and mutton for a few years (incidentally, entirely with horse-drawn power, mechanisation coming along a decade or two later). There were no cattle running on the property to speak of, nor could Bill go out and knock a 'roo or buffalo over by way of a change from mutton, but Bill was too happily busy to give the old pipe-dream a second thought. As the years rolled by, the Mates' correspondence gradually petered out altogether, but that's the way it goes; fair enough!