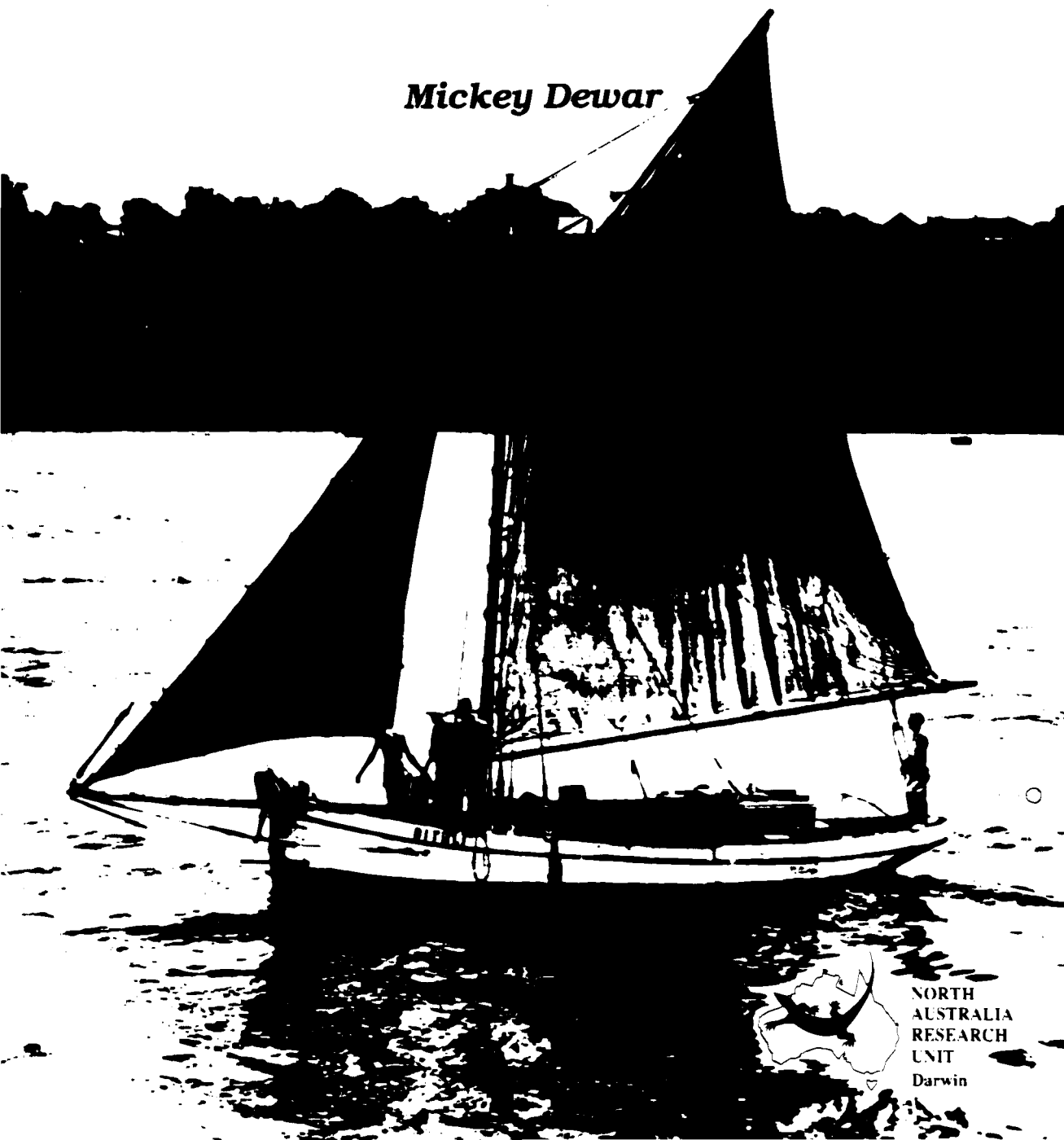


THE 'BLACK WAR' IN ARNHEM LAND

**Missionaries and the Yolngu
1908-1940**

Mickey Dewar



NORTH
AUSTRALIA
RESEARCH
UNIT
Darwin

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Mickey Dewar



**THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY
NORTH AUSTRALIA RESEARCH UNIT**

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For Fred Gray, who remembers the 'Black War'

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PREFACE

Yo! Dig it, man. Jus' down here's where them Japfellas got it in 33 ... five of 'em. Fishin' for trepang right down there in the bay, a couple of luggers, just about there I'd reckon, and bingo! It's all over. Five of 'em with spears hangin' outa their bellies.

'Yo, wild season that one. This mob, Caledon Bay mob, Blue Mud Bay mob, wild eh?! Killed two whitefellas on Woodah Island, down south, and then spear copper, Constable McColl, same place.

'Mission mob, Groote Eylandt, where we're goin', they thought them Balamumu was gonna attack 'em, 'cross the water 'n all. So they stuck broken glass 'round all them buildings! (McMillan 1988, 167).

In 1931 Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory was gazetted an Aboriginal Reserve and so technically closed to all outsiders with the exception of the Anglican and Methodist missionary societies. In practice, the coast of Arnhem Land provided fishing grounds for large numbers of non-Aboriginals. In particular, Darwin-based boats with Japanese crews would harvest trepang along the northern coast bartering tobacco, flour and trinkets for Aboriginal labour. The 'Black War' was the name given by journalists to a series of homicides perpetrated by Arnhem Land Aborigines in the 1920s and 1930s. During this period several Japanese and Europeans crews off fishing boats in the Gulf of Carpentaria were killed.

The missionary societies had, with the compliance of Federal and Territory administrations, worked to isolate the Arnhem Land Aborigines. They felt uncontrolled contact with outsiders such as the boat crews would have a deleterious effect on the morals, health and economy of the Aborigines. The publicity given to the killings and the subsequent trials enabled the societies to argue the need to consolidate their position as benevolent supervisors of the region and restrict further entry of non-Aboriginals into Arnhem Land. In spite of this argument, the subsequent handling of events by the Methodist and the Anglican societies put them at odds with the Government and ultimately led to a decline in their influence in the region.

In the ensuing public debate the role and purpose of the Arnhem Land Aboriginal reserve was re-examined and the missionary societies themselves came under scrutiny as Australia moved towards the development of a federal policy for Aboriginal people.

I first visited Arnhem Land as a student teacher in November 1980. I returned in January of the following year to take up a permanent position as teacher to post-primary girls at Milingimbi Bilingual School. About to begin my first serious employment, I wore a white pressed cotton dress and a straw hat with red cherries on the brim. Arriving at the Darwin light aircraft terminal I heard the unwelcome news that Milingimbi airstrip was under water and that the plane was to be re-routed to Ramingining on the mainland. After a rough wet season flight in a six-seater Cessna, I arrived at Ramingining to discover the radio 'sched' had been interrupted by the poor meteorological conditions and that I was totally unexpected. I rode in the open back of the mail truck in the pouring rain. As we jolted along the rough roads from the airstrip, showers of drenching red mud sprayed around and over me. The brim of my new hat drooped down to my eyes. I sat drinking my first cup of tea with dried milk and too much sugar and listened to the radio 'sched' predicting my imminent arrival. Milingimbi radioed that although the school boat was 'out' (broken-down), someone would be sent to pick me up from the barge landing before nightfall.

After a 20 km ride on the back of the truck I was left at the barge landing where I sat on my luggage for three hours slapping mosquitoes in the rain. At dusk a boat arrived. It was driven by an Aboriginal man who apparently did not speak English but casually began to heft my luggage onto the boat. I waded out through water which to my wild imaginings was full of box jelly fish and crocodiles. As the sun set we made the short trip across to Milingimbi in the soft-falling rain. Someone took me to my allotted house, the exterior of which was shrouded in creepers and waist-high grass. The interior was festooned with mould and filled with more mosquitoes than I had ever experienced. I sat on my luggage and wept. What was I doing here? Even in 1981, Arnhem Land in the Wet season was a daunting place for Europeans. My casual assumptions as a member of the dominant culture drawn from the customs of white Australia and manifested in my language, dress, and behaviour were no longer appropriate. What must it have been like for the white people who came early in this century to begin settlement in Arnhem Land? I could not imagine.

Years later, after I had returned to Darwin to work, I began research on the early settlements of Arnhem Land for an MA(Hons) degree with the University of New England. This book is a result of the research undertaken for the thesis. Unlike the thesis, this book concentrates on the Caledon Bay and Woodah Island killings (the 'Black War') and the effects this had on Government policy and non-Aboriginal settlement of Arnhem Land. The primary focus is therefore upon north-east Arnhem Land and I will only briefly refer to the western Arnhem Land settlements. I suggest that people looking for more detail on the settlement of Arnhem Land as a whole consult 'Strange bedfellows: Europeans and Aborigines in Arnhem Land before World War II' (Dewar 1989).

As the killings at Caledon Bay and Woodah Island took place more than fifty years before I even began my research, oral history did not appear to be a very likely proposition. I was very fortunate, however, in making contact with Mr Fred Gray, who agreed to be interviewed. Since 1983 I have been visiting Mr Gray regularly to share a cup of tea and his recollections of life in Arnhem Land. For an oral historian it was the ideal position, as I was able to interview, research, check and confirm Mr Gray's account of events. Where there were conflicting versions, I could go back and present these to Mr Gray for comment. Mr Gray also introduced me to Ms Connie Bush MBE who had been taken from her family as a child in the 1920s to live and work at the Emerald River CMS mission on Groote Eylandt. Ms Bush agreed to an interview and the vivid and candid descriptions of her childhood were helpful in attempting to piece together a picture of the life at Groote Eylandt. Mr Gray made available to me copies of letters, diaries, reports and photographs that he had kept. This book owes a great deal to the generosity with which Mr Fred Gray shared his memories and personal records with me.

Other people and organisations around Australia also helped a great deal. My thanks to the Northern Territory Government for the NT History grant in 1987 which enabled me to do research in Canberra and Sydney; the University of New England for a post-graduate grant and in particular my MA supervisor, Jo Woolmington. In the Northern Territory, thanks to my current supervisors David Carment and Alan Powell for encouragement to take this on. I am particularly grateful for the enthusiasm and editorial assistance of David Lea and Ann Webb at the North Australia Research Unit. For access to the archival data on which this study is based, thanks to Chris Thompson of the Uniting Church, Darwin, and to the Federal Secretary, the Reverend Dr David Claydon, and the Reverend Canon Barry Butler of the

Church Missionary Society in both Sydney and Darwin for giving me permission to use mission records and discussion of policy; to Barbara Pederson of the Northern Territory Archives Service, and staff at the Australian Archives in Darwin and Canberra; the Special Collection, Northern Territory University Library, Casuarina Campus; the Northern Land Council Library, Darwin; the Mitchell Library, Sydney; and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra, for their courteous efficient services. My thanks also to the Yolngu of Milingimbi, particularly the post-primary girls, who taught me some of their language and stories. To David Ritchie, my special thanks for support and enthusiasm.

When referring to the two missionary societies operating in Arnhem Land, for convenience I use the acronyms CMS to refer to the activities of the Anglicans, and MMS to refer to the Methodists. For much of the period under study, the Anglican society was under the control of the Church Missionary Association and the Church Missionary Society of Australia and Tasmania, but in contemporary periods Anglican missionary work in Arnhem Land is associated with the simpler title, Church Missionary Society. Similarly, in the contemporary period, Methodist missions, which now come under the umbrella of the Uniting Church, have been closely identified with the Methodist Overseas Mission in Arnhem Land, but for this period they were under the control of the Methodist Missionary Society of Australasia. To avoid confusion therefore when referring to the Methodist society, I use MMS.

Although there are distinctive dialects in north-east Arnhem Land, in all the dialects the word 'Yolngu' is used for 'human being' (Williams 1986, xv). The term is also used as a way of defining people from north-east Arnhem Land as distinct from other Aborigines, as for example, in an urban community such as Darwin where Aboriginal people congregate from other areas (Coulehan, unpub). 'Yolngu' has therefore been used by researchers to describe the people from this area (Morphy 1977; Keen 1978) and I follow this practice. The people of Milingimbi, Elcho Island, Yirrkala, Caledon Bay, Blue Mud Bay and, in part, Ngukurr (Roper River) are identified as 'Yolngu'.

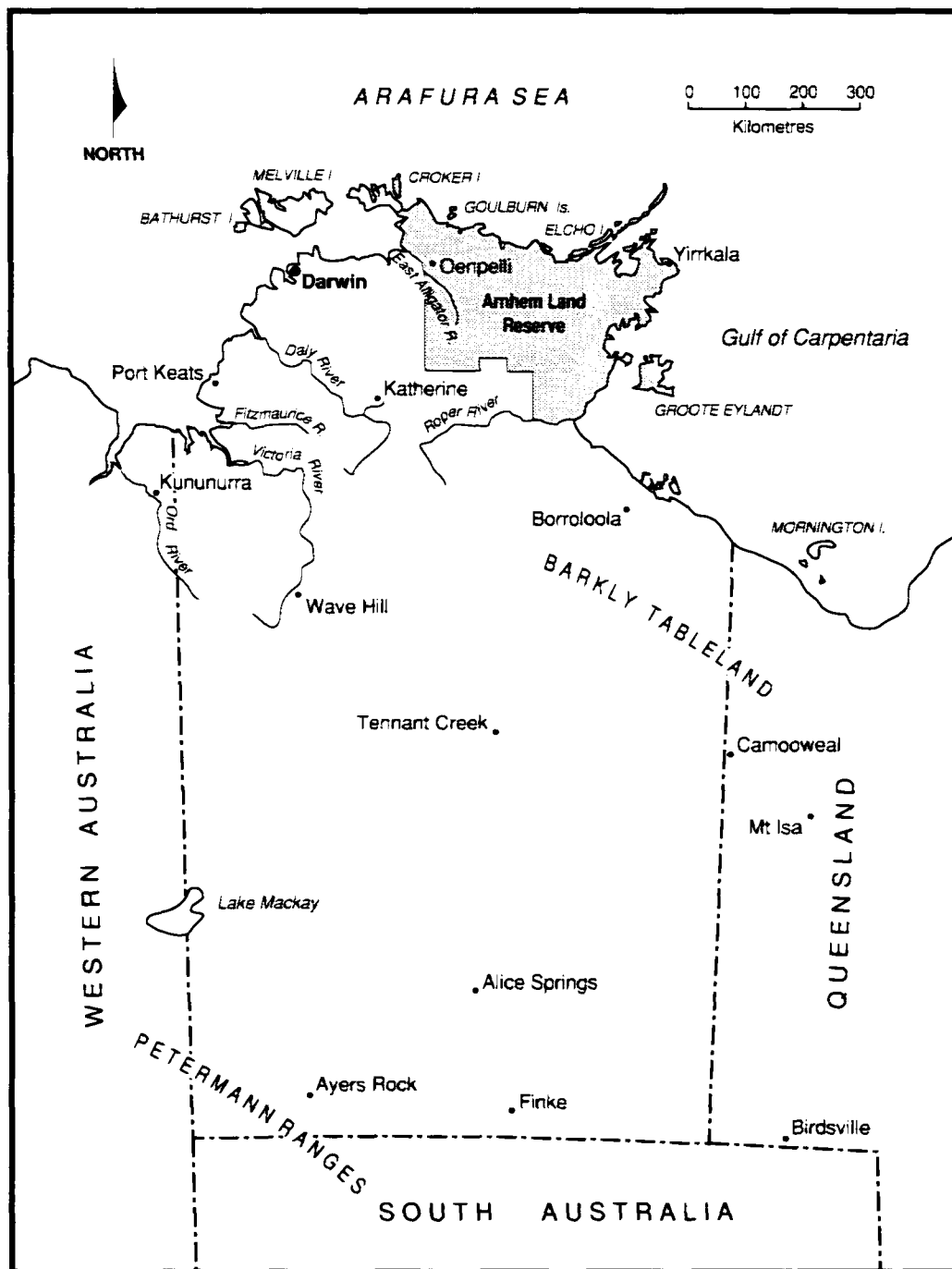
Not all the Aboriginal people mentioned in this study call themselves 'Yolngu' however. The inhabitants of the island communities of Goulburn, Groote, and Bickerton are considered separately. In mission records and Government archives, Aborigines are rarely referred to as being from a linguistic group or 'tribe'. More commonly, Aborigines are described by the English name of their birthplace or

country, or by the settlement with which they become associated. For example, Harry, from Milingimbi mission is acknowledged to be an Elcho Islander. He is therefore referred to in sources alternatively as Harry from Milingimbi mission, or Harry from Elcho Island. Similarly, Yolngu involved in the killings at Caledon Bay are described as being Blue Mud Bay people or simply the Caledons. For syntactical and stylistic consistency therefore, it has been sometimes preferable to refer to Aboriginal groups in terms of the English geographic name with which they are commonly associated. When I refer to Aborigines in a pan-Australian sense I use 'Aborigines' (Broome 1991).

I acknowledge that the use of the phrases 'black', 'white', 'part-Aboriginal' and 'half-caste' is offensive to Aboriginal people. Since the terms were in common usage in the period of the study, I have adhered to the conventions of the time because I did not see I could accurately represent the policies and opinions of people without using them. I do not intend in any way to deny the Aboriginality of people who are referred to as such.

Archival material cited in the text can be identified as follows:

CRS A	Australian Archives, Canberra
CRS F	Australian Archives, Darwin
NTRS	Northern Territory Archives Service, Darwin
FGPP	Fred Gray's private papers
ML	Mitchell Library, Sydney



Map 1 Arnhem Land in relation to the Northern Territory

CHAPTER ONE

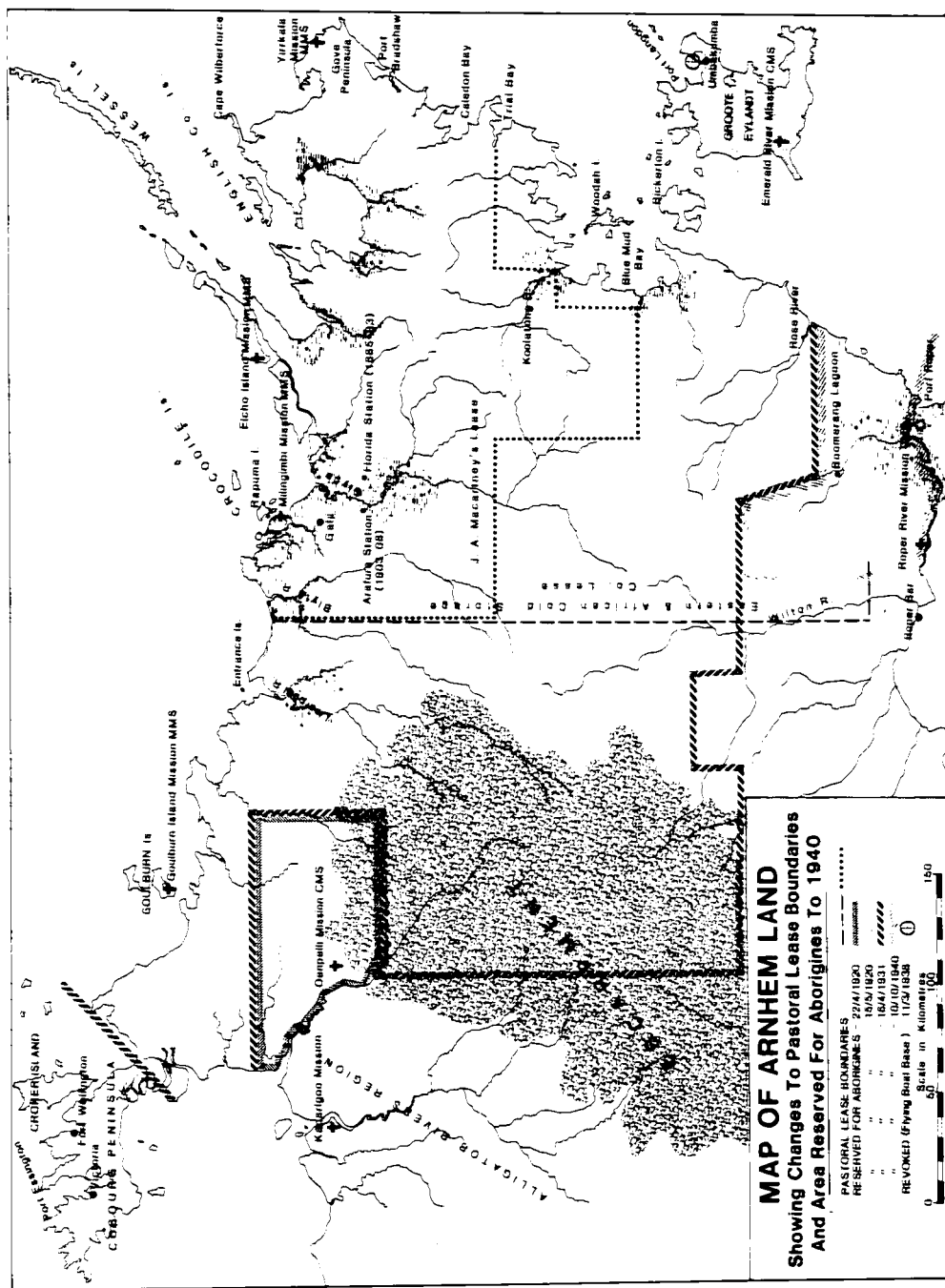
THE LAND, THE YOLNGU

A party sent ashore were soon surrounded by twenty-five natives who immediately commenced hallooing and shouting to us in a menacing way ... two of them advanced with spears ... I ordered a musquet to be brought ... seeing this the Indians stopped and ... immediately set up a yell of loud and angry cries accompanied with the most furious gesticulations ... I was not very anxious to communicate with these people (King 1827, 257).

The area of land which today forms the Arnhem Land Land Trust is bordered on the west by the East Alligator River, and on the south by the Roper River, encompassing the land and off-shore islands north to the Arafura Sea and east to the Gulf of Carpentaria. Cobourg Peninsula and the mining towns of Nhulunbuy on the Gove Peninsula and Alyangula on Groote Eylandt, however, have been excised.

The Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve was conceived of partly because of Commonwealth and Northern Territory administrative policy requiring that the Aborigines be kept out of Darwin and partly because missionary groups working within the area were able to successfully convince the Government that they could achieve a level of social control if they could be insulated from the rest of the Territory.

The Arnhem Land Land Trust area has undergone many boundary changes since its inception culminating in the passage of the Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act 1976 which vested title to the land with a land trust under the direction of the Northern Land Council (Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act 1976 Pt. 2 Sections 4i, 5i, ii). Although from the beginning of the twentieth century church people had been vocal in their support for the establishment of reserves for Aborigines in the Northern Territory (CMA 1908, 2, CRS A3 14/7500; Wheen 1914, 1, CRS A3 23/4594), the first steps taken to establish the Arnhem Land Reserve were the result of a Government initiative. Once the decision had been made in Queensland to establish large reserves distant from centres of white population, the Commonwealth, Western Australian and South Australian Governments cooperated to establish the Central Australian Reserve in 1920 (Rowley 1980, 251).



At the same time an area of about 5,100 square kilometres was declared as a reserve for the use and benefit of Aborigines in the Oenpelli area on 22 April (*Commonwealth Gazette*, no. 36, 22 April 1920). As a result of the actions of workers from the Church Missionary Society, Groote Eylandt was declared an Aboriginal Reserve shortly afterwards on 4 May 1920 (*Northern Territory Times and Gazette* 15 May 1920). Nothing further was done about the granting of land for a reserve in Arnhem Land until the results of the Bleakley Report were published in 1929.

In 1928 JW Bleakley, Queensland's Chief Protector of Aborigines, was invited by the Commonwealth Government to report upon the conditions of 'Aboriginals and Half-Castes' in Central and Northern Australia. One of Bleakley's recommendations was to reserve Arnhem Land for use by the Aborigines (Bleakley 1929, 35). Accordingly in April 1931 the Arnhem Land Reserve was established, some 79,900 square kilometres, roughly the present-day borders excluding the Roper area south of present-day Numbulwar (*Commonwealth Gazette*, no. 33, 16 April 1931). In 1938 a small section of land on Groote Eylandt near Umbakumba was excised for the purpose of establishing a 'Flying Boat Base' at Port Langdon for the refuelling of Qantas aeroplanes flying between London and Sydney (*Commonwealth Gazette*, no. 15, 11 March 1938). In 1940, the Roper River area was included and the boundary of Arnhem Land was extended further south with the river as its south-eastern boundary to the sea at Port Roper (*Commonwealth Gazette*, no. 210, 10 October 1940).

While substantially the area has remained the same up until the present day, there have been some excisions (for the purpose of mining) and additions including Croker Island and, for a short time, part of the mainland on the Cobourg Peninsula (which was later revoked). In 1963 the area was adjusted again as the missions' leases were incorporated within the Aboriginal Reserve. The final border was fixed in 1966 (*Commonwealth Gazette*, no. 62, 14 July 1966).

Physically the country of Arnhem Land consists of mostly low-lying areas with an elevation of less than 50 m. The area to the west of Arnhem Land contains the massive sandstone escarpment which extends west into Kakadu National Park and east for some 120 km into Arnhem Land. The vegetation in this region is sparse and hardy, able to tolerate arid climatic conditions and nutrient deficient soils. There are a number of species specific to this environment (Brock 1988, 9-10).

The country gradually changes going east to flat ironstone plains covered by light stringy-bark forest. Near the coast in the north and the east, the rivers which drain the stringy-bark forests form huge coastal freshwater swamps with paperbarks, pandanus, waterlilies and sedges. Conditions on the flood plains are extreme for vegetation; during the wet season the soil is waterlogged but towards the end of the Dry the clays dry out and harden creating conditions few plant types can tolerate (Wells 1982, 61). Separating the swamps from the sea are large tidal areas of mangroves and salt flats. The mangrove communities of Arnhem Land contain a rich and diverse number of species. They stabilise the coast and estuaries by retarding tidal erosion, and they provide a rich environment for crustaceans, molluscs and fish (Thom 1982, 15-16). There are many small islands in the shallow coastal waters. A tidal range of over 7 m causes large areas of mud, sand and coral to be exposed at low tide (Mountford 1960, 2).

Yolngu believe that their relationship to the land or each other came about because of an ancestor or ancestors who first created the features of the countryside and the land itself as they travelled a path across the land at the beginning of all existence (Thomson 1949, Williams 1986). The journeys of ancestral beings were recorded and transmitted by a series of stories, songs, rituals, artworks and ceremonies.

Every Yolngu is a member of a complex kinship network. By comparing the structures of these kinship systems, the Berndts postulated that at the time of initial contact the Yolngu could be categorised as belonging to one of two broad regional groups. The western group occupied the area between the Liverpool and Alligator Rivers. The eastern group was contained within the area from Cape Stewart to Blue Mud Bay. The Berndts describe the western group as being organised into 'tribes' and groups of 'tribes' which were integrated linguistic and social units. Tribal blocs were formed by trade, marriage, and mutual participation in secular and sacred ceremonies (Berndt & Berndt 1954, 7; Tindale 1974). The eastern group comprised linguistic groups like the western peoples, however these groups were further divided by a kinship system that categorised all people into one of two exogamous groups known as 'moieties'.

The largest unit of social grouping accepted by most researchers as having a corporate relationship with land is the 'clan', a unilineal descent group usually based on the principle of patrilineal descent (Elkin 1981; Peterson 1976). Custody of particular elements of the

mythological charter that link the 'clan' with the land are held by men and women of the group according to their relative genealogical position as well as patrimoiety, semi-moiety and even subsection affiliation. Control of these elements determines rights of access to land and responsibility for its management (Williams 1986).

The Yolngu were unique in that they were the first Aborigines to have contact with foreign visitors, the Macassans. Whereas in other parts of Australia, the first contacts with outsiders were the Europeans who came as explorers, settlers or for strategic military purposes, in the north, prior contact had been made by Malay peoples for a very different purpose. The Macassans' interest was not permanent settlement, but rather seasonal visits to exploit the trepang beds off the north Australian coast.

From the colonial Dutch East Indies only 300 nautical miles north of Australia, exploratory voyages were made by Dutch sailors searching for precious commodities to trade. Arnhem Land was named after the ship the *Arnhem* which sailed to the coast of northern Australia early in the seventeenth century with Carstenszoon, the Dutch explorer. But the Dutch found little of commercial interest and preferred to trade in the islands to the north of Australia and the first outsiders to visit on a regular basis were the indigenous Malay-speaking traders from Macassar, now modern Sulawesi.

Since the seventeenth century, or perhaps even earlier (Macknight 1976), the Macassans had been seasonally visiting the coast of northern Australia, Marege', to harvest and process trepang (beche-de-mere) found in the shallow waters of the Arafura Sea. The Macassan fishermen returned to Macassar, sailing with the south-easterly trades of the dry season; they did not settle in Marege' permanently. They did not travel as far as Cape York and were not welcomed by the people of Bathurst and Melville Islands (Searcy 1907, 46-7), although they called in to the coast of Western Australia (Kai-Jawa). Although it is considered that the Macassans did not alter the 'fundamental bases of society' of the Aboriginal people, they did leave a variety of biological, technological, linguistic and cultural legacies (Macknight 1976, 88-92; Urry & Walsh 1981, 90-103). Interaction between the Macassan fishermen and the Yolngu is frequently described today with fond nostalgia:

Mungatharra [Macassans] never built anything or stayed. They were here for a short time only. **Mungatharra** came only for trepang. They were exchanging tobacco, beads, cloth - useful things

- exchanging for trepang - giving exchange. That's how Yolngu people came to know them better. **Mungatharra** were not really white men. Some were black, really Yolngu people. Yolngu, when they saw them coming in, weren't so afraid. (Dreyfus & Dhulumburk 1980, 14-15).

But there were other accounts too which detail violent disputes over women and alcohol (Mirritji 1978, 22-3; Lamilami 1974, 71, 73; Searcy 1907, 82-3; Cole 1972a, 31, 32).

Perhaps it was this long experience of dealing with Macassan people which made the interaction of Europeans and Yolngu less on the outsiders' terms in Arnhem Land than it was in other places in Australia. Macknight wrote: 'the old [Yolngu] men, for whom the memory [of the Macassans] was at least real enough to be used as a psychological weapon against the onrush of European civilization' (Macknight 1976, 127) By the time the first European explorers made contact, the Yolngu had had about two hundred years' experience of seasonal semi-permanent settlement and had been introduced to the notion of employment and trade for goods and services. Unlike the Aborigines in other parts of Australia, the coming of the Europeans to Arnhem Land did not mean the first foreign introduction of these ideas. The gradual diffusion of foreign ideas and technology that occurred in Arnhem Land was a contrast to the culture shock resulting from the unprecedented and sudden European settlement in other places.

Incursions by non-Aboriginal people into the country of the Yolngu changed the lifestyle of these people by introducing exotic material culture, animal species and diseases. Settlement by Europeans attempting to transmit their own spiritual beliefs would attempt to challenge the mythological and ritual bases which underpinned Yolngu society.

CHAPTER TWO

THE NEWCOMERS

Young anthropologists know all about missionaries before they've met any. The[y] play a large role in the demonology of the subject, beside self righteous administrators and exploitative colonials (Barley 1983, 28).

British incursion into Arnhem Land began with the explorer Matthew Flinders at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Flinders 1814). Flinders in the *Investigator*, and later Captain Phillip Parker King in the *Mermaid* (King 1827) charted the coastline around Arnhem Land for the British whose economic optimism in northern Australia was high, particularly after the successful foundation of Singapore in 1819 (Powell 1982, 47).

Between 1824 and 1849 the British unsuccessfully attempted the establishment of three settlements to the west of Arnhem Land. These northern settlements were established for commercial and strategic reasons as part of Britain's 'swing to the east' (Cameron 1989) in an attempt to weaken the Dutch hegemony in the East Indies. Settlement impinged on Arnhem Land only indirectly until 1844 when Ludwig Leichhardt crossed the south of Arnhem Land in an attempt to establish a route from Moreton Bay to link the British settlement at Victoria with those on the east coast (Leichhardt 1847). Despite the failure of the British settlements, further exploratory ventures were undertaken in the hope of setting up a trading entrepôt in the north (Reece 1989). The Arnhem Land region was considered both for its economic potential and to provide a possible site for a settlement.

In the late 1850s Thomas Baines, the artist from Augustus Gregory's expedition, travelled with two others in a longboat from Croker Island east along the Arnhem Land coast (Braddon 1986). A decade later Captain Francis Cadell on the *Beatrice* carried out a survey of land and sea between the Roper and Liverpool Rivers including the Wessels and Groote Eylandt (Cadell 1868) to look for a suitable site for a settlement.

Exploration in Arnhem Land continued to be stimulated by speculative enterprise. In 1883 David Lindsay crossed Arnhem Land from the Roper River north-west to the Liverpool River to assess the pastoral potential of the country (Lindsay 1884). In 1910 Stuart Love took a party west across Arnhem Land on behalf of investors in Melbourne to undertake mineral exploration of the area (Love 1910, NTRS 574).

With the exception of the military settlement at Victoria, these incursions were relatively brief. Most of the explorers reported some conflict with the Yolngu (Flinders 1814, 188-9; King 1827, 65, 391-2; Braddon 1986, 127-8; Lindsay 1884; 6, 13-15). As late as 1910, the Love expedition resulted in a massacre where Police Constable Jim Kelly 'had to shoot a couple of niggers' at Caledon Bay (Love 1910, 152, NTRS 574).

By the late nineteenth century, however, the non-European population of Arnhem Land had increased and the pressures caused by competition for land found expression in open conflict. On the southern border, hundreds of men travelled west from Roper Bar to work on the construction of the Overland Telegraph line (Bern 1974, 73-4). The discovery of gold at Pine Creek by construction workers brought the arrival of thousands of Chinese miners (Jones 1987, 86) and by 1884 Roper Bar had become a rough frontier town of some five hundred people (Cole 1985, 26; Searcy 1907, 111). The non-Aboriginal population enforced a rigid segregation, breach of which was punishable by death, restricting Yolngu entry into areas designated whites only (Searcy 1907, 113).

In Arnhem Land itinerant whites, with Yolngu assistance, engaged in various marginal industries such as pearling, buffalo shooting and trepanning. The men who operated these sporadic industries are remembered by the Yolngu chiefly for their violence (Dreyfus & Dhulumburk 1980, 16; Lamilami 1974, 77-86).

In the boom of the pastoral industry in the 1880s, Arnhem Land was divided into pastoral leases held by Fisher and Lyons in the west and Macartney in central Arnhem Land. Macartney, who owned Florida Station, had a particular reputation for violence in dealing with the Yolngu and 'It was a case of shooting at sight' (Searcy 1907, 184-5). But by the depression of the 1890s many of these isolated pastoral leases were abandoned as the country proved unable to sustain a cattle industry (Bauer 1964, 156).

A further attempt was made to develop a pastoral industry when Arafura Station was taken up by the African Cold Storage Supply Company in 1903 in central Arnhem Land. Arafura Station was not a commercial success (Bauer 1964, 157) and the company was liquidated in 1908. The station is remembered today for the extreme violence of its managers. Accounts have been collected from both Yolngu and non-Aboriginals who remember the massacres of Yolngu in the area (Bauer 1964, 157; Dreyfus & Dhulumburk 1980, 19-20; Read & Read 1991, 19-24; Van der Heide 1985, 15, 16, 52, 53).

It was against this backdrop that Christian evangelical work was initiated by the Church Missionary Society in Arnhem Land stimulated by an emotive plea by the Bishop of North Queensland at the Australian Church Congress in Melbourne in 1906, 'Any work they could do might be merely smoothing the pillow of a dying race; but that pillow should be smoothed' (*The Argus*, 22 November 1906).

With the assistance of the Bishop of Carpentaria, Gilbert White, a site was chosen on the Roper River (White 1924, 34; White 1925, 141) and in July 1908 a party of Anglican missionaries was farewelled from St Paul's cathedral in Melbourne to begin work in Arnhem Land (CMA 1908, CRS A3 14/7500). Their impressions on arrival at the site at Roper River were fairly gloomy: 'August 29, 1908 - Landed at Roper River ... homesick but full of love for the poor degraded blacks around us' (Joynt 1918, 3-7). By the end of the first year the missionaries were able to claim no converts but:

Seven acres have been cleared and fenced, and some of it planted. Three substantial buildings have been erected for the staff, stores, school etc, together with several native huts. In this work the Aborigines were encouraged to assist (CMA 1909, CRS A3 14/7500).

From the very beginning, hopes had been expressed by the CMS that the Roper site would be the beginning of an expanded network of missionary settlements and the establishment of 'an adequate Reserve' (CMA 1908, CRS A3 14/7500). The CMS missionaries proposed expansion of their work, perhaps by taking over the abandoned Florida Station homestead (Sharp 1909, 10) or by setting up a series of temporary settlements (Thomas 1911, 8, CRS A3 14/7500).

The missionaries worked hard to break down the Yolngu social and cultural practices that they saw as antagonistic to Christianity despite

a recognition that Yolngu society appeared to be both peaceful and fulfilling:

The Aborigines ... are of nomadic habits, their wants are few, and they appear to have a happy contentment with their condition or at least they evince little if any desire for a better order of things. They certainly lack the moral force to rise unaided socially or otherwise. They adhere tenaciously to their superstitions, and although they listen patiently to the Message which the Missionary bears, they appear to have no conception of Sin or its iniquity; much less, any desire to be free from its tyranny. They are constantly suffering from the vile effects of their system of assigning infant girls to old men; but apparently lacking the intelligence to amend the custom (Thomas 1911, 3, CRS A3 14/7500).

The inhabitants of Roper River mission laboured under the 'Gospel of Work' (Joynt 1918, 7). Rising at five in the morning, the daily work was allocated according to gender. The girls worked in the kitchen, laundry, bakehouse, missionaries' houses, dormitory and yard and looked after the younger children. The boys worked in the garden, then milked, chopped wood, looked after the horses, dormitory, yards and stores. Breakfast was at 7.15 am. There was a morning service, then school began at 9.00 am and was conducted in two shifts, morning and afternoon. Children not at school would work. School taught reading, writing, arithmetic, geography and attempted to introduce European notions of manners and 'habits of cleanliness'. On Sundays, however, only work absolutely necessary for the survival of the community was attended to (Joynt 1918, 15). This rigorous program was made more difficult by the missionaries' assumption of total responsibility for feeding, maintenance and housing of the children within the dormitories. The dormitory system however was considered essential to shield the children from the 'influences of the camp'. The missionaries were further tried by the habit of families withdrawing their children temporarily from dormitory life; a 'very grievous difficulty but one which we hope in time to overcome' (Thomas 1911, 3 CRS A3 14/7500).

The missionaries worked to inculcate British social values and attitudes:

Our great hope is in the children, they are such bright merry quaint little chaps ... In my class I have such nice little lads. They are called Campbell, Percy and Wilfred. We have great talks and songs

together, and when I have coaxed them to have a good wash each day their little black bodies fairly shine. They sit around me with wonder and amazement in their eyes, while I read them Bible stories and tell them about the dear Lord Jesus ... I wish we had a cricket set, we could have such grand games with the boys (Joynt 1909, 11).

Not surprisingly, this approach appeared to have little evangelical success. The Yolngu helped with the building program (Joynt 1918, 7) and attended Church diligently enough but without abandoning any of their own beliefs:

the Mission children, girls in neat cotton dresses, and plump little boys clad only in sarongs made of flour bags ... In one corner crouched a few myall blacks – those who did not belong to the Mission but who were encamped near by, and were temporarily working there at herding goats or digging, in return for tucker and tobacco. In the midst of this orthodox Christian service, some of the blacks sat with their hands over their eyes so that they might not see those of their relatives on the opposite benches whom they were forbidden by Aboriginal law ever to behold (Masson 1915, 139).

The CMS had more success at promoting a settled village lifestyle, although this was not without its problems. Apart from their lack of knowledge about Aboriginal culture, missionaries were faced with the task of establishing a village agrarian community in circumstances where technology was primitive, transportation difficult and climatic conditions unknown. These problems were compounded as the task had been entrusted to people with faith but relatively few skills who were attempting to motivate an indifferent work-force. This impossible situation, combined with spiritual and cultural isolation prompted a spate of resignations. Lack of staff continuity meant that long-term projects had little chance of success. A typical report noted:

The fever has kept us back greatly ... Our old store room is being eaten by borers, and won't last much longer. We used the wrong timber. The pine grows on top of Mt. Scott. There is not a great deal of it. We camped there for a week, cut and adzed roughly then slithered the beams down precipitous sides steeper than the roof of a house. It is slow and laborious ... Mr Sharp gives me concern. His fever is so constant. The heat is steady now ... so we stand [and] broil all day ... Little Ruth has been feverish (Huthnance 1909, 11).

Ignorance, ill health and the 'Gospel of Work' all undermined morale. The site itself at Roper River was badly chosen. In the wet of 1915-1916 the station was completely flooded and had to be evacuated to nearby high ground with much of the previous work of the settlement destroyed (*The Age*, 16 March, 1916).

The interpersonal difficulties between staff, coupled with their ignorance of the situation led to a pattern of mistakes, expense and a decline in the Yolngu attendance at the mission which made closure seem inevitable. In 1913 however, Roper River gained a new Superintendent whose energy enabled the settlement to overcome its earlier problems and cleared the way for the objective that had been in abeyance for the first five years – expansion. The Reverend HE Warren became Superintendent and by the following year White was able to report that the staffing difficulties had been largely resolved (White 1914, 2, CRS A3 14/7500).

Despite this report, life for the both the missionaries and the children at the settlement was difficult. Mary (Katie) Chrome, who was later to marry the missionary Alf Dyer, kept a diary of her first years at Roper and it details her chronic unhappiness. The children were continually 'absconding' from the settlement to fulfil Yolngu traditional ritual and kin obligations. The dormitories became potential grounds for the very behaviour the missionaries were attempting to suppress:

2 of the boys had gone over to the girls dormitory in the night. One had stayed in the lubra's room & the other got one of the girls to go out of the dormitory. Percy one of the boys who has been here a long time & Andrew ... the guilty girl confessed at once, the boys had disappeared but came back ... the 3 from the dormitories were to have their hair cut right in the centre & shaved a mark that they would carry for a little while & that would remind them & the other children of the sin that caused it (Chrome 1913, 23 Oct, NTRS 693).

Katie Chrome wrote: 'we must punish those who persist in doing wrong even if to them it is not sin' (Chrome 1913, 24 Oct, NTRS 693). 'Doing wrong' included leaving the mission without permission. Not surprisingly 'abscondings' were common. In the two months between November 1913 and January 1914, for example, at least 20 women and children are described as 'absconding' (Chrome NTRS 693). Women were unwilling to be separated from their children and both were initially unwilling to conform to the institutionalised roles of the settlement. The punishments for these absences were frequently

physical: whippings or canings. The Yolngu women who worked in the kitchen at the settlement took flour to give to non-mission associates (Chrome 1914, 4 Feb, NTRS 693); no doubt to fulfil kinship obligations, but such acts were regarded by the missionaries as theft. May Dove, another missionary wrote:

The depressing influence of life among a heathen people hangs over one like a cloud ...

Nature so wedded to their lives so dull of head – slow of heart to understand believe (Dove nd, NTRS 685).

The missionaries chastised themselves for failure to hold a stable population; such introspections perhaps prevented them from acknowledging let alone understanding the complex social structure and law that regulated Yolngu society. More than ten years later Norman Tindale, an anthropologist closely associated with the CMS, commented:

The failure of so many schemes for the improvement of the natives has been in not treating the people from the native point of view ... The sudden taking away of the authority of the old men & the breaking up on the old laws of morality which are strict although not conforming to our ideas, & replacing them with rules which the natives do not understand and often hold in light regard is a bad step (Tindale 1925, xv, NTRS 868).

These problems notwithstanding, by 1915 the mission requested permission to open two new stations: at the mouth of the Roper River and on Groote Eylandt (Ebbs 1915, CRS A3 23/4594). Despite a lack of enthusiasm on the part of Territory Administrator Gilruth (Gilruth 1915, CRS A3 23/4594), Warren undertook a number of exploratory voyages around the Gulf to look for potential sites (Warren 1916, CRS F5 R105). The missionaries explored Rose River, Bickerton Island, Woodah Island, Nichols Island and then went on to Groote. Warren was very optimistic about the country on Groote Eylandt:

Miles of the best grass we have seen – fresh water creek is running strong – waterfalls with a drop of 12 ft. Permanent water – flats easy of cultivation and irrigation by natural fall and we believe would grow almost anything well [Warren's emphasis] (Warren 1916, CRS F5 R105).

Warren returned full of enthusiasm and sent his report to the Northern Territory administration as well as the Church Missionary Society. On 15 February 1917 he wrote:

*You will see from the Report the few places that would be suitable for a Station, but I strongly advise that the openings of two new stations be undertaken at once ... Mr Dyer and I are both in unison in saying that the **spot at the Mouth of the Rose River** and on the **Emerald Creek in Groote Island** are the best we have seen on the whole trip [Warren's emphasis] (Ebbs 1917, CRS F5 R105).*

By 1917 the Yolngu population at Roper River had declined. Following the recommendations of Spencer (1913, 21), Warren proposed a new policy that would guarantee Government support:

I think the solution of the difficulty would be if the Government would give us a separate allowance for each half-caste child on the station, say 5/- per week each. We now have here over 50% of half-castes, and very shortly this station is likely to be a half-caste institution and a pure black child will be rather a novelty (Ebbs 1917, CRS F5 R105).

Accordingly on 18 December 1917, Ebbs received authority from Henry Carey, then Chief Protector of Aborigines, to assume responsibility to clothe, feed, teach and maintain Aboriginal children with non-Aboriginal kin until the age of sixteen for the sum of 3/- per week per child, on behalf of the Victorian Branch of the Church Missionary Society of Australia and Tasmania (Carey & Ebbs 1917, CRS A3 17/2913).

Warren's suggested change of policy was supported by Bishop Newton who wrote to the Victorian Branch of the CMS in August 1918:

The tendency of the half-caste is to sink to the level of the Aborigines ... I would suggest a bold and big policy ... to declare the whole of the North East of the Territory as a reserve ... the whole area be closed to white settlement for at least fifty years and that missions be established (Cole 1972a, 37).

At much the same time that the Anglicans were beginning to expand their work in Arnhem Land, the Methodists started to show interest. A meeting of Protestant Churches was held in Melbourne in 1912 after the Federal Government assumed responsibility for the Northern

Territory, to allocate 'spheres of activity' to each of the churches. The General Conference of the Methodist Church met in Brisbane in 1913 and resolved to begin a mission to the Aborigines of the Northern Territory (McKenzie 1976, 1).

In the six years that had elapsed between the time of the foundation of the Roper River Mission by the Anglicans and the time the Methodists decided to send missionaries to the Northern Territory, the administration of the Northern Territory had passed from the Government of South Australia to Federal control under the Department of External Affairs in Canberra. Sir Baldwin Spencer, Professor of Biology at Melbourne University, had already completed a report on the Aborigines of the Northern Territory commissioned by the Federal Government. In reaction to his recommendations for the setting up of reserves, an inter-denominational committee had been established to reach agreement on the 'delineation of the Northern Territory amongst the various Churches for the purpose of establishing Missions amongst the Aborigines' (Wheen 1914, 1, CRS A3 23/4594).

The approach of the Methodists was more cautious and methodical than that of the CMS. The MMS were anxious to secure a firm commitment from the Federal Government determining exactly what their role and contribution would be in advance. The Reverend Wheen wrote:

Up to the present the Methodist Church have no Missions to the natives, and we now wish to ascertain how far the Government would be prepared to fall in with our plans in regard to assistance. We have a number of requests...

- (1) that reserves for the Aborigines be set apart...*
- (2) that the Federal authorities be asked to grant some land free to the various Missionary Associations for Mission purposes...*
- (3) that a suitable annual amount be granted for educational purposes and industrial work in connection with the Missions...*
- (4) that the whole of the proceeds from the land be applied for the welfare of the natives (Wheen 1914, 1, CRS A3 23/4594).*

The Methodists saw themselves in a role that anticipated more than simply providing an outpost administrative framework to facilitate religious conversion. They saw themselves as providing the logical solution to the Government's problem of what to do with the Aboriginal populations of the remote Northern Territory. They were in effect undertaking to provide the expertise necessary to make Spencer's

recommendations of separate development for Aborigines a reality. As the agents of Government policy, the Methodists expected the Federal treasury to foot the bill.

The Reverend James Watson was sent to the Northern Territory to determine a site for the Methodist mission station. On 21 October 1915 he applied on behalf of the MMS to the Land Board through the Administrator for an option over North and South Goulburn Islands and an area on the adjacent mainland (Wheen 1915, 2, CRS A3 23/4594).

The final decision to take up the Goulburn option was probably not based solely upon Watson's observations. Nicholas Holtze, then Curator of the Botanic Gardens at Darwin, had undertaken an inspection of North and South Goulburn Islands and written a glowing report in 1911. He suggested that the islands would be suitable for:

indiarubber, sisal hemp, coconuts, peanuts or cotton ... the great quantity of chicken pearlshell would seem to indicate good pearling grounds ... para rubber ... or upland rice ... fair stock country (Holtze 1911, CRS A3 23/4594).

The Mission Board resolved to commence its work in the Northern Territory as early as possible in 1916 (Wheen 1915, 2, CRS A3 23/4594). This was under the proviso that the Government agreed to the conditions of settlement laid down in 1914 and reiterated in 1915. In addition the mission was granted the rights to trepang beds within 8 km of the coastline and the right to remove trespassers (Wheen 1914, 1-2; Hunt 1916, 1, CRS A3 23/4594).

Watson and party established a settlement on South Goulburn Island in 1916 selecting an area with good elevation and water supply. Watson reported that the island was uninhabited, but Lazarus Lamilami, then a young child, recalls that his people left Goulburn when the missionaries came because they were apprehensive following their earlier experiences with Europeans. Unfortunately the site that Watson chose for the new mission, was the 'main ceremonial and ritual ground' for the Goulburn Island and neighbouring mainland groups. Custodians of the site state that 'it broke the hearts of the people' when the missionaries moved in. That the missionaries chose to locate their church on a site invested with secret sacred meaning by the ancestral beings is an ironic allegory of first contact between the missionaries and the Aborigines throughout Arnhem Land. The incapacity of the missionaries to comprehend their unwitting act of

desecration combined with the Goulburn Islanders' inability to communicate the subtlety of their religious beliefs with the newcomers ensured that the often brutal process of imposition of the dominant European belief system had irrevocably begun. From the day Watson landed, ceremonies were performed on the mainland and no new ceremonial grounds were established again on Goulburn Island (Lamilami 1974, 90).

The MMS missionaries from Goulburn were initially regarded by the Northern Territory administration sceptically. But the MMS undertook a propaganda campaign to secure government support. Whilst the CMS granted the Government access to candid reports of their operations, the Methodists provided the Government with carefully prepared lecture notes and slides hoping to secure the support of the Administrator: 'in this way during the next few years a lot of information will be disseminated' (Watson 1916, CRS A3 23/4594). MMS's active public relations campaign and their insistence on obtaining written assurance of the level of Government assistance in advance reveals how closely they identified with Government interests and the degree to which they saw themselves as agents assisting the implementation of Government policy.

Like the Anglicans before them, the Methodists envisaged a future in which their settlement would be transformed from a fully funded outstation to a self-supporting village community with an economy based on trepang harvesting (Hunt 1916, CRS A3 23/4594). They also envisaged that the settlement would become a base for a network of other communities: 'Our idea is that we must commence quietly and as things develop establish new stations' (Wheen 1914, CRS A3 23/4594). But the MMS approach to the planning of their mission empire was cautious compared with the impulsive decisions which characterised the CMS at Roper. The experiences of the CMS at Roper River and perhaps the record of failure of missions to the Aborigines in the nineteenth century convinced the Methodists of two things: the need to reconnoitre the country and its people, and the necessity to obtain adequate Government support. Subsequent events show that the success of missionary settlement in Arnhem Land for the next twenty-five years hinged on the ability of mission planners to meet these criteria.

The Goulburn Islanders were equivocal in their response to the coming of the missionaries. At first they fled. Some returned, however, and eventually allowed their children to be placed in dormitories under the control of the missionaries. As at Roper River, attempts were made to

house the children in dormitories apart from their parents. Although the concept of separation of unmarried men and boys from the family group was well established in Aboriginal society, the evidence suggests that at Goulburn the children were unwilling to leave their families. Despite the apprehension experienced by the Goulburn Islanders at the arrival of the missionaries, news spread quickly of the flour, sugar, tea, cloth, and tobacco which was distributed in return for helping the missionaries (McKenzie 1976, 11).

Hedrick in his thesis on the Methodist Church in Arnhem Land points out the pattern of settlement that was common to all the settlements established by MMS. After the site had been chosen, the first priorities were the building of staff quarters, sheds and outbuildings, and the establishment of gardens. Later the Church and the dormitories were added. As with the CMS, Aborigines provided much of the labour for these projects. The work was divided by gender along familiar lines: the women were engaged in washing, sewing, gardening, manufacturing crafts, child care, learning about hygiene and so on while the men were encouraged to undertake various manual tasks including digging and watering the garden, chopping and carrying firewood, fencing, ploughing, drain making, latrine digging, rubbish disposal, diving for and processing trepang. The missionaries interspersed work with prayer. Prayer sessions were held morning and evening as well as weekly Bible study; additional prayers were held on Wednesday afternoons, a church service was held on Sunday and a Sunday school was held in the evening for the children (Hedrick 1973, 18-20).

The missionaries attracted a proportion of the Goulburn Islanders on a seasonal basis using the incentives of food, gifts and protection in exchange for work, attendance at worship and the surrender of their children to the dormitory system. The people associated with the mission were quick to grasp the letter if not the spirit of the Europeans laws:

some of the people were sent off the island for stealing ... in the early days, they just had to go away if the missionary said so - poor fellow. Sometimes, if no-one owned up when something was stolen, they would decide and one man would say he had done it. He would go away and take the punishment. Otherwise there would be no rations for anyone for two or three days. Then the people would make sure that the man who had gone away would get the things he needed ... the people would give him some food and tobacco ... if someone wanted to get another man into trouble,

he would steal some things and tell the Superintendent that another man had taken them. This happened many times (Lamilami 1974, 96).

Until 1927, the Methodists were distributing food two or three times daily (Hedrick 1973, 19). The CMS distributed porridge and occasionally meat.

Within the first six months, as well as maintaining regular patterns of worship Watson and his assistant, AE Lawrence, began an assault on un-Christian practices. Watson and Lawrence attempted to subvert traditional marriage customs by working with young men who were presumably motivated by the desire to obtain a wife. Watson found: 'Hoary superstitions and customs woven into every warp and woof of the native mind, some actions devilish in the extreme' (Watson 1917a, NTRS 45). Both the MMS and the CMS believed they had a moral duty to undermine any social structure that supported 'child brides' and polygamy. Watson wrote optimistically: **'everywhere, the coming of Christianity means the emancipation of women'** [Watson's emphasis] (Watson 1917a, NTRS 45), an irony in the light of modern experiences. Emancipation meant domestic duties, cooking, sewing, cleaning and was considered preferable to the skills practised daily by the Goulburn Island women as a matter of survival. This interference with traditional practices bred resentment amongst many Goulburn Islanders towards the missionaries and caused a sharp division in the community between those who found it advantageous to follow European practices and those who preferred traditional law. The missionaries for their part undermined the social structure by playing on the discontents of the younger generations and subverting the authority of the elders.

The missionary presence in Arnhem Land brought about a polarisation within the community. By 1917, there was considerable violence expressed between mission and non-mission people. Cecil, one of Watson's companions from his first visit to the Northern Territory, was speared in the leg with a fish spear. Watson arranged for the man who had attacked him to be arrested. Watson wrote: 'Cecil's assailant is doing 6 months hard "labour" in Fannie Bay Gaol while Cecil is using his legs to good purpose about the work of the station' (Watson 1917b, NTRS 45). From the beginning of settlement the missionaries were a destabilising influence on the social system. The missionaries unashamedly supported those who ingratiated themselves with the mission at the expense of 'outsiders'. The case of Cecil's spearing illustrates how the missionaries were able to offer protection for

infringing traditional law thereby gaining their first 'loyal followers'. Watson described another incident:

Peter attacked by a young black, weapon used being bar of iron, ribs staved in lung being pierced ... Assailant was chafing ag'st [sic] restraints imposed and got the idea that old ways were being decaded [eroded?] and he sought to reinstate the old wild and woolly days. At present he has flown to the mainland to dodge the ... stock whip (Watson 1917b, NTRS 45).

Watson commented flippantly: 'Cecil and Peter have since shown such devotion to business and such a gratitude that for a while I wondered if spears and iron bars were instruments of conversion' (Watson 1917b, NTRS 45). The early missionaries were completely inflexible and believed their presence in Arnhem Land was by divine right. Goulburn Islanders who did not agree with their ideas or methods, were simply wrong and had to be either removed or forced into compliance by physical chastisement or food rationing.

After the takeover of the main ceremonial ground by the missionaries, Lamilami noted the division within the community. While some members of the displaced group wanted to establish a new ceremonial ground on Goulburn, others refused because of the proximity to the mission and maintained that a mainland site would have to be used. Violence erupted again in 1919 when a man called Nundal attempted to start a rebellion. He organised the 'boys' to break out from the school dormitory and disrupt the activities of the mission (McKenzie 1976, 17). Watson wrote that Nundal was responsible for: 'abducting lubras, alleged murder of a woman, encouraging men to down tools and a riot at Trepang camp. Then went to mainland and gathered mob of 24 A[borigines]'s' (Watson 1919, NTRS 45). Presumably Nundal wished to rid Goulburn Island of the influence of the missionaries. Nundal's resistance to the new ways was countered swiftly and Watson recorded that he and '3 other scoundrels' were handed over to the police in Darwin.

Despite the different denominations and number of missions involved, the north Australian missions to the Aborigines reflected similar assumptions and attitudes. The respective missions worked actively to alter the marriage customs of the Aborigines as a response to the system of polygamy, infant betrothal, and young girls becoming the wives of men much older than themselves. Father Gsell, the Roman Catholic missionary, summarised the feelings of all when he wrote of the Tiwi, 'It was always to me a sad sight to see these poor little mites

of from eight to ten years becoming the playthings of old grey-beards whose other, old wives, too often made them drudges while he, himself, thought nothing of making them the object of shameful trading' (Gsell 1956, 78).

While the mission was a haven for victims of abuse, it also became a local haven for those who wished not to conform to the laws and mores of traditional society. The discipline and authority of the old men and women was regularly flouted by individuals who knew that they were protected and even encouraged at the mission. The attack upon the social system by the missionaries was in some respects successful; it had the immediate effect of weakening the internal discipline. At this stage, the missionaries do not appear to have made any attempt to understand the complex kinship system with its avoidance relationships and category of 'potential spouse' that is at the heart of Aboriginal social organisation. By attempting to change marriage customs, the missionaries induced people into 'wrong side' marriages, the offspring of which were considered the product of an incestuous union. In this and other similar ways they did a great deal to break down the structure of the society:

mission-protected youths, or those who have grown up in the habit of paying lip-service to Christian religion, have alienated themselves in various ways from tribal custom, law and religious precepts. A number of these youths indulge in sexual licence under the unconscious protection of the mission (Berndt & Berndt 1951b, 42).

The missionaries failed to grasp the intricacies of the society they were dealing with. At this stage, the measure by which the missionaries judged the 'spiritual transformation' of the Aborigines was by their capacity to assume as many European customs and patterns of lifestyle as possible.

By early this century, both the Anglicans and the Methodists had established missionary settlements from which to expand and form an evangelical network across Arnhem Land. More tenacious than the pastoralists and encouraged by the government, missionary settlement was infinitely more enduring.

CHAPTER THREE

CONSOLIDATION AND EXPANSION

As we shall see, Indians without souls to be saved or bizarre customs to be interpreted would be of little value to missionaries or anthropologists. When it comes to working the native preserves, representatives of both groups are often found taking the same position (Arens 1979, 168).

Throughout the 1920s, the isolation of Arnhem Land came under threat from the increasing numbers of Japanese trepang boats operating along the coast. Yolngu from the Gulf area assisting in the trepang industry area came into conflict with the Japanese crews over work conditions and sexual abuse. Crews of several boats were massacred after incidents where workers were not paid or were threatened with rifles (Berndt & Berndt 1954, 153-7; Morey 1933a, CRS A452 53/106).

In 1927 a Coast Watch was formalised (Weddell 1929, CRS F1 39/59). All of the coastal missions were alerted to report 'unusual movements of vessels or aircraft off the coast, landings etc. of enemy parties ... and activities of enemy agents, in time of war (or proclaimed imminence of war)' (Dept of Defence, CRS F1 39/59). The missions were eager to cooperate as they deplored the presence of foreign fishing boats, whose crews would frequently barter sought after commodities such as alcohol, steel and tobacco for the sexual services of Yolngu women. Despite the killings of Japanese crews by Yolngu which culminated in the infamous massacre at Caledon Bay, in 1936 Methodist missionary Theodor Webb estimated that there were some 50 boats operating in the Crocodile Islands area alone, with Japanese crews totalling nearly 800 (Webb 1936, 1, CRS F1 53/266).

At the same time as Arnhem Land was becoming known as the abode of aggressive Aborigines, its reputation received a bizarre addition with the story of the white women survivors of the *Douglas Mawson*. In March 1923 there was a violent cyclone which destroyed virtually all the buildings at Emerald River (Perriman 1923, NTRS 703) and wrecked the *Douglas Mawson*. Rumours began to spread that there were two white women survivors living as 'captives' of the Aborigines (CRS F1 37/584; Riddett 1990).

The story received sensational press coverage both overseas and nationally. For the next fifteen years missionaries, police, and other experts appear to have spent considerable resources preparing lengthy and often tediously detailed refutations of the story. The extraordinary press this story received added to and consolidated the image of Arnhem Land as wild, exotic, barbaric and unknown.

But apart from the sensational reporting of such real or imagined events in Arnhem Land, the area was also the subject of quite separate Governmental interest. The findings of the Bleakley report, *The Aborigines and Half Castes of Central Australia and North Australia*, published in 1929, seemed to unite the aims of both government and missionaries in Arnhem Land. Bleakley recommended that with the exception of the mission leases, the bulk of the land in the present-day boundaries of Arnhem Land be reserved for the Aborigines (Bleakley 1929, 35).

Reserves for Aborigines in the Territory were not a new idea. Baldwin Spencer had recommended reserves for Aborigines in 1911, but Bleakley saw the missions operating within the boundaries of the reserves as agents of a controlled and inevitable process of subsuming Aboriginal society within white Australia. In contrast to Spencer, Bleakley made it clear that the object of the reserve was not to repatriate Aborigines from other areas (Bleakley 1929, 30) but rather that Arnhem Land would facilitate the 'benevolent supervision' (Bleakley 1929, 33) of the tribal Aborigines still remaining on their land. Such supervision, could in Bleakley's view, best be exercised in Arnhem Land by the missions with additional Government assistance (Bleakley 1929, 40).

Attitudes to Aboriginal welfare in this period tended to fall into two separate schools of thought. The Arnhem Land missions favoured what could be called an assimilationist approach whereby white Australian society could be gradually introduced to Arnhem Land Aborigines via the missions. The missionaries not only had strong support from the respective church groups who largely funded their organisation, but also from certain influential government officials and academics including Bleakley and later AP Elkin. The Federal Government tacitly supported missions because they wanted the system to operate as cheaply as possible.

The Northern Territory administration, represented by Chief Protector Cecil Cook and later supported by anthropologists Donald Thomson and Fred Rose, favoured a more separatist approach which was

largely supported by the secular community. Throughout his life Cook remained a strong critic of the missionary system for the administration of Arnhem Land. Unlike Bleakley, Cook did not consider the missionaries appropriate administrators for Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory (Cook 1981, 18, NTRS 226) and was vocal in his expression of these views. Cook considered missionaries to be incompetent and the missions disorganised. He believed that the missions sites were often badly chosen and unable to support the populations of Aborigines who came in from the bush on the expectation of food, that the diet the missions offered was nutritionally inadequate, that the missionaries were ignorant of the sanitary and hygienic conditions necessary for the populations of these small towns and that the missions introduced and helped spread infectious diseases such as hookworm and tuberculosis. This last fact was not compensated for by the medical services offered by the missions which were substandard, and administered by an unskilled staff (Cook 1981, 18-20, NTRS 226).

A large reserve such as Arnhem Land was seen to have two functions. While it was a means of giving 'tribal' Aborigines access to their lands and freedom to maintain their traditional culture and a way of coping with non-Aboriginal incursion, it was also a means of containing them. While this idea of keeping the Aborigines out of major urban centres such as Darwin is not dealt with directly in the Bleakley report (Bleakley 1929, 30), it was a theme of the earlier writings of Spencer and one of the main reasons for the creation of the first Aboriginal reserves in the Northern Territory in the 1890s. Cook overtly expressed this view:

Mission policy has been purposeless – the finished product of the Mission School taught to appreciate and need the legitimate amenities of white civilization is left without the opportunity of enjoying them except by migrating from the Reserve to centres of settlement (Cook 1937, CRS F1 38/716).

The separatist idea ran counter to the ultimate missionary goals of complete Aboriginal assimilation into the wider non-Aboriginal community. Although now the separatist idea has been more widely accepted as a means of the Aborigines retaining cultural identity linked through legally recognised land tenure, it is ironic that the first widespread support for it came from officials hoping to restrict the number of Aborigines arriving at European centres.

The establishment of mission villages, intended as bases for further settlement, was completed by the early 1920s. Missionary activity is by

definition evangelical and both Watson and Warren had anticipated the possibility of expanding the influence of their respective denominations. In the decade prior to the Bleakley report both the CMS and the MMS attempted to achieve this objective. In 1920 Dyer went to Melbourne and spoke with the Minister for Home and Territories and permission was granted for settlement on Groote Eylandt.

The Bishop of Carpentaria had suggested the move to Groote Eylandt to allow the 'Half-caste' children from the Roper and surrounding districts to be brought up shielded from their familial cultural influences. Perriman wrote: 'it was decided to transfer the half caste people from Roper to Groote so as they would be quite separate from their old associates' (Perriman HL, 1987, pers comm, March). For the staff and children alike this move was difficult. For the children it meant a breaking of kinship ties and a shift to a remote and isolated island. Connie Bush, who was a child at the time of the move to Emerald River said:

But you can imagine girls going over from a place like Roper River where the ... cargo ships called in regularly where the people from all the stock stations around would come in to collect their stores ... going to a place like Groote Eylandt which was completely isolated and never saw anybody ... Never saw their relatives, never saw anyone ... The mission was fenced and we weren't allowed to speak to one Aboriginal there (Bush C 1987, 21 June interview).

The station at Emerald River was almost completely destroyed in the cyclone of 1923 and the whole station had to be relocated a kilometre upstream on higher ground (Cole 1975, 39). Territory bushman and author, Bill Harney, who was to marry Linda Beattie from the Emerald River mission in 1927, wrote a description of the mission and the work the inhabitants had to do:

Groote Eylandt Mission looms up before me now ... When they erected bush buildings with bark sides and roofs, the termites sent out word to all their friends to come in to the feast. A grand corroboree of the termites was held at the mission and, as the missionaries slowly built and sang their praises to the Lord, so the termites joined in the chorus with the steady crunching away of building poles ... Still the missionaries clung on. The native children gathered round, not from faith but because their elders could see a little bit of tobacco attached to the children who went to school (Harney 1946, 154).

Harney's cynicism about the motivation for associating with the mission was probably justified. The missionaries were aware of the seemingly irresistible attraction that a regular supply of tobacco provided. While missionaries debated the morals of introducing this addictive drug to the remote tribespeople in private correspondence (Dyer 1916, NTRS 693), at this stage the imperative of luring potential workers governed their day-to-day practice.

Emerald River began operating as an institution from 1924. Aboriginal parents were in dread of the missionaries taking their children away and mothers would rub charcoal on the children with lighter skins in an effort to dupe the missionaries (Cole 1972a, 59). The attitude of the European mission staff to the children varied according to the individual. Mary Chrome is recorded as having felt 'repulsion' initially which she overcame (Dyer nda, NTRS 693). Connie Bush says that the children were aware of the feelings of the staff towards their charges:

We were part-Aboriginal so what did they care. Nobody wanted us. They just wanted to ram religion down our necks that's all, not all of them. But a lot of them thought of us as human beings and cared for us but we were always reminded that we weren't as good as the white people (Bush C 1987, 21 June interview).

May Dove, a missionary who came to Groote in 1924, felt that the shift from Roper to Groote would give the children 'their own place of abode'. Dove justified the appalling conditions at Emerald River on the grounds that they were shared by the mission staff and children alike. She noted that they all suffered from the sense of isolation after the comparatively social existence at Roper River (Dove nd, NTRS 685).

The tasks attempted in setting up the mission were ambitious including a bridge and weir on the river, a saw-mill, dormitories, houses, church and school. The missionaries recruited local labour using the Groote Eylandters but when this proved erratic, they relied on the older children in their charge. Harney wrote:

The first time I saw my wife, Linda, she and the other girls were hauling on a rope, dragging a jinker that carried a log of cypress timber for the sawmill. As I looked at the tense muscles of those straining forms, heaving and hauling so that timber should be cut to build a church for the glory of God, I became ashamed of all this mad, misplaced energy (Harney 1946, 154).

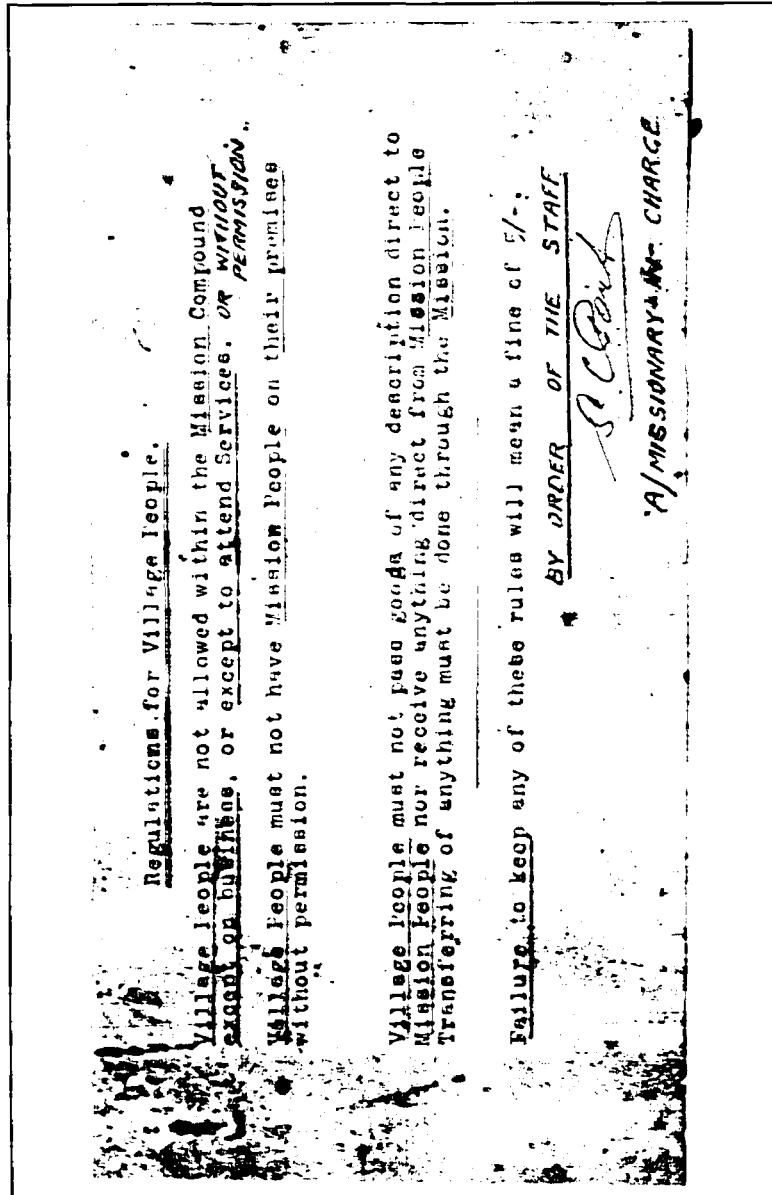


Figure 1 'Regulations for village people' c1932, NTRS 868, Northern Territory Archives Service



1 'Missionaries Groote Eylandt 1925', rear: L-R Mr Perriman, Miss Dove, Lousada, Miss Cross; front: Rev Warren, Betty, Mrs Warren, David, NTA NTRS 694/Pt 1,350



2 The Reverend Alf Dyer and his wife Katie, 1925, NTA NTRS 694/Pt 1, 201

Connie Bush, although herself only a young child, recalled the efforts made by the older girls:

If we could handle the shovel and hoe we had to go out and work in the garden ... big hoes bigger than ourselves and the shovel, picks. We used to dig out trees ... We used to pull right up into the hills and get timber, to be brought into the saw mill by the mission ... on the rough, rough road and taken to the saw mill and sawn up. Our big dormitory was built entirely on timber from there. Cypress timber and that (Bush C 1987, 21 June interview).

Plagued by the problems of isolation, physical hardship and of building and establishing gardens beset by termites, Emerald River had made a shaky start.

Initially, for the Methodists, expansion was slower. Dissatisfaction with the geography and general suitability of Goulburn Island prompted the Methodist missionaries also to look elsewhere for a potential new site. The choice was soon narrowed to Milingimbi or Elcho Island, however the society's inability to commit themselves to one location or the other ultimately delayed the development of their second missionary base in Arnhem Land. Milingimbi was eventually chosen.

Milingimbi mission commenced in similar circumstances to Goulburn Island mission. As at Goulburn, conflict broke out almost immediately among the Yolngu between those who were hostile and those who were friendly to the establishment of the mission. Feuding was common between different groups concentrated in the small area and sometimes people were killed (McKenzie 1976, 31). Much of this was to do with the fact that the sedentary European presence simultaneously attracted Yolngu to one area who had different rights and responsibilities to the country. Prior to the establishment of the mission, Milingimbi, like Goulburn, could not have supported a permanent resident population as the resources of the island were limited. During the investigation of a tribal murder, resentment at European interference was shown when the lay reader, James Robertson, and Police Constable, Vic Hall, were led out into the mangroves and abandoned, although they managed to find their way back (McKenzie 1976, 30).

The Reverend James Watson left Milingimbi at the end of 1925 as he was approaching retiring age and had experienced poor health for

some time. Milingimbi then came under the administration of the lay preacher, James Robertson, and several Torres Strait Islander assistants before a replacement for Watson could be found. Watson believed in corporal punishment for infringements of the social code as he saw it:

The lubras appreciate the fact that murderous assaults are no longer tolerated, and in some very serious cases, after tending the lubras, we attended to the lords of creation with the double of a stockwhip (Watson 1925, 16, CRS A431 51/1397).

Robertson appeared to be an heir to that tradition. In June 1927 three Yolngu men were charged with the attempted murder of Robertson (*Argus*, 10 June 1927). In the course of the trial it emerged that the suggested motive for the attack was resentment for a beating that Robertson had inflicted on one of the men, Larry. The new Methodist missionary at Milingimbi, Theodor Webb, admitted that Yolngu were beaten to enforce discipline but claimed that the missionaries were justified because of the extreme isolation of Milingimbi (Markus 1990, 75).

The account collected by Read and Read describing this incident suggests that it was Robertson's efforts to break down the traditional marriage system which provoked the situation. Willi Wallilepa related a story which is an account of a dialogue between Robertson and some of the Yolngu men. Robertson begins:

Ah, look here, boy! We got the idea now, for that mission come here, Milingimbi ... We don't like you, you get married to that two double wife, here ... All you Aborigines cut it out. Breakem down your culture. You want to use one, and the Bible, law, one wife and children...

*[The Aborigines are reported to have answered] Ah, Mr Robertson, you come here with too much humbug for this island. You breakem down our culture for the Yulngu people, Aborigine people ... We don't [want] **this** law, that your European law. You go away, Mr Robertson. We don't want you come and talk to me any more, questions asking me about ... 'How many wife you got? Five? Six? That mine! That my business!*

[Robertson replied] Now look here! I'm going to give you whip (Read & Read 1991, 64).

This may be an allegorical rather than a literal truth but it is interesting that this is the perception of events that is remembered by the Yolngu today. The physical punishment occupies only one fraction of the story, rather the story emphasises that it was the interference in traditional law which caused the greatest resentment. So while the revelation of physical punishment was shocking to the missionary authorities in Melbourne, it was the intrusion into traditional law that is remembered with the greatest rancour by the surviving Yolngu.

Few missionaries of the period were able to converse in more than rudimentary form in the local languages. Most, if not all information about Yolngu society came from 'informants' who had mastered English. The missionaries had no independent way of determining the veracity of these informants' advice. The missionaries were open to manipulation by the Yolngu interpreters who consequently gained enormous power within the mission community. Webb naively narrated a story of murder and cannibalism told to him by one of the Christian Yolngu:

Few weeks ago, some station boys went to mainland for reg. walkabout. One of our Xian helpers went over a fortnight later and found that one of the boys had been killed and eaten. He came across one of the murders with portions of the body in a dilly bag. Striking this native to the ground, he took the bag and reverentially buried it with its contents. – All this within thirty miles of the station (Webb 1926. NTRS 45).

But the missionaries were probably told what they expected to hear (Arens 1979; Pickering 1985). Jessie Goldsmith later was to say of her early years at Goulburn Island:

We felt at a loss, not being able to understand a word of the native language. The children and some of the young people ... spoke from good to indifferent English but we understood nothing of what the older people said. No time was lost in getting from the school boys some of the aboriginal words but it was well nigh impossible to get them to speak to us normally in the native tongue, they all appeared to want to impress us by their use of our language. This together with the multitude of daily jobs to be done made progress, if not impossible, very slow (Goldsmith, 1972, 2, NTRS 45).

Gradually the missionaries' negative perceptions of Aboriginal society were modified.

The political implications of the change from hunter-gatherer to sedentary agrarian communities for the Aborigines were enormous. Aboriginal groups from all around the area of European settlement would move in to the community, occupying the land over those with traditional rights to that country. This pattern of settlement consisting of,

a conglomeration of clan groups with various geographical origins, differing dialects, and other points of dissimilarity ... established for administrative ease and economy, have damaged the traditional Aboriginal social structure through the creation of new inter-clan or group tensions (Altman & Nieuwenhuysen 1979, 193).

But alongside the 'interclan or group tensions' was the spiritual and physical alienation from country. As the depopulated areas became vacant other groups moved in. At Oenpelli, a Gunwingu woman, Ngalgindali, who resided at the mission in the late 1920s, articulated the problem:

Now we all want to stay here; we don't go back to live in our own places where we were born. We just forget that country. Then they come, those different Aborigines of one kind and another. They eat all our food and meats, there in our country, and our wild honey too ... Maybe, ourselves, we should have stayed in our country, so that we could make a place if any "white" man ever came and settled there (Berndt & Berndt 1951a, 27).

At Milingimbi, Webb by 1929, had begun to realise some of this. Along with the lack of water and the poor soil, he identified the polarising effect the mission, with its sedentary lifestyle, was having on the Yolngu:

The present position at Milingimbi is however rendered unsatisfactory to an even greater extent by the disposition of the people with whom we are dealing. Almost all the people who are closely identified with the Mission do not belong to this locality at all but came over when the Mission was removed from Elcho Island, many of them really belonging to districts over 100 miles to the Eastward. These are the people who have made the Mission their permanent home and who on every count must be retained but it will be clearly seen that they constitute an alien community set down in a foreign country.

Under present conditions little or nothing can be done for the natives for whom Milingimbi would be the natural centre as tribal differences and hostilities make it impossible for them to settle down with these who mainly constitute the Mission Station. The result of this existing state of affairs is constant friction and unsettlement which render satisfactory work an impossibility (Webb 1929, 1-2, CRS A1 33/7370).

Webb's identified 'state of friction' was to exist for some time at Milingimbi and all the other mission stations in this pre-war period.

In 1928, Webb reported: 'During the year some troubles of an inter-tribal character have occurred among the Station people and ... on the adjoining mainland where ... a number of killings have taken place' (Webb 1928, 1, CRS A431 51/1397). In 1931 an attack was made on the mission:

a night attack made on some of the station people by party from mainland and who were, regretfully led by one of the mission men. One man killed and one man and one w[oman]. wounded. Wide-spread disturbance (Anon 1931, NTRS 45).

The precipitation of inter-group hostilities was a characteristic phenomenon of, although not confined solely to, the Methodist mission stations. The Berndts noted that, 'arguments and fights were of almost nightly occurrence in the Oenpelli camp' (Berndt & Berndt 1951a, 27).

Gradually Webb came to recognise that the breakdown of 'traditional' Yolngu society coupled with a proselytising attitude to western culture created a destabilising influence in the community. In 1934 he wrote:

The social and ceremonial life of the people is interfered with as little as possible and they are contented and happy. Their behaviour throughout the year has been good and very few offences of even a minor character have occurred (Webb 1934, 1, CRS F1 53/266).

Webb realised that polygamy, frequently seen by the earlier missionaries of both denominations as an evil to be suppressed, was an integral part of a finely balanced social system. He commented:

We represent the dominant and aggressive civilization of the Western World and unfortunately in the minds of most of us our religion is so inextricably interwoven with our nationalism that

unconsciously we expect any advance and development of these people in social and economic life, as well as in religion, to be along conventional Western lines (Webb nd c1935, 2, 4, CRS A1 37/9260).

At Groote Eylandt the situation was deteriorating. The Emerald River settlement was proving difficult to operate and maintain. Towards the end of the 1920s, the Victorian CMS became divided on the issue of the 'Euralians'. Some church people considered the work 'subsidiary to the real and original efforts of the society' (Cole 1972a, 40-1), that of missionary work to the remote Aborigines. The CMS missionaries had always favoured severe corporal punishment for misdemeanours (Bush 1990, 16) but as morale dropped they resorted to bizarre practices ostensibly in an effort to maintain discipline:

they used to use not heavy, heavy chains but you know launch chains. They are lighter than the boat chains. Light aluminium chains that they use for luggers and things that used to be tied around a post ... and that would be wound around the girl's leg and then wired with galvanised wire that tight and padlocked so they wouldn't move (Bush C 1987, 21 June interview).

The Emerald River missionaries used punishment as a public humiliation: 'The girls Doris, Rhoda, Esther, and Hannah have all been put in stocks. Even in church they have been clamped in the stocks' (Hall R 1933, CRS A659 43/1/70). These punishments were meted out for such crimes as 'answering back to the missionaries' (Bush C 1987, 21 June interview). But Connie Bush does not dismiss all missionaries whom she came into contact with as cruel or sadistic. People like the Warrens, Dyer and others are remembered with affection and warmth:

One side of their nature was very ... oh what would you call it? How could you describe it? You know ... it was, it was as if they enjoyed making - not all of them only two or three ... enjoyed ah, making the kids their ... seeing them suffer like slaves ... You know. And the other half ... they were really good (Bush C 1987, 21 June interview).

At Emerald River much of the resistance to the system came from the children themselves. Some of the older girls who had been brought from Roper had had close contact with their Yolngu families and extended kin networks and for them the move to isolated Groote

Eylandt meant loneliness and the unendurable physical labour as they were forced by the missionaries to make the settlement self-sustaining:

Some became so unhappy that they of course fought ... so the missionaries saying [sic], 'Oh, we'll get rid of this one.' And then somebody else would do their gripe to ... Dr Cook ... Somebody would go and work for somebody out on the stations and those who had contacted [sic] leprosy was sent to Channel Island, and then there was only four of us left ... Four girls (Bush C 1987, 21 June interview).

By 1933 the population of the Emerald River mission had been reduced from 34 in 1925 to nine (Fenton 1934, 4, CRS A659 43/1/70). The CMS then decided to focus their efforts on the local people and by the following year there were eight Groote Eylandt children at the mission (Fenton 1934, 9, CRS A659 43/1/70).

At about the same time, the parent CMS settlement at Roper River mission was in difficulty largely as a consequence of the innovations of the new superintendent, the Reverend Keith Langford Smith. In his early twenties, Langford Smith, 'a likeable chap' (Gray 1992, 23 February interview), was trained as a pilot and had ambitious dreams to link the CMS missions of Arnhem Land by air. Although he became a controversial figure, Langford Smith is viewed by the CMS as a 'visionary' although 'inexperienced' (Claydon D. 1992, pers comm, 20 March).

On arrival at Roper, Langford Smith had been appalled to find that little or no effort had been made to learn any Aboriginal languages or develop a system for writing them down (Langford Smith 1935, 59). He recognised the significance of acknowledging Aboriginal beliefs and culture in Christian transmission: 'Surely it is better not to suddenly denude the Aboriginal, but rather to let development come gradually and from within' (Langford Smith 1936, 48). Langford Smith distributed leaflets advertising mission services which involved sale of salt ('good, clean') and an engineering workshop which promised repair and overhaul of all types of car and marine engines ('All work fully guaranteed') (Roper River mission nd, CRS F1 38/534). By 1932, the mission plane Sky Pilot had flown over 27 200 km in Arnhem Land using makeshift airstrips at Caledon Bay, Goyder River, Oenpelli, Liverpool River, Crocodile Islands, Rose River and even more remote places where beaches were used at low tide to land and take off (Langford Smith 1932, CRS F1 38/534).

But despite his progressive views, Langford Smith was forced to abandon his plans for the development of a missionary network in Arnhem Land as a result of escalating conflicts with the Northern Territory administration. Initially his problems began with a default in payment of an account for the services of a ground engineer to the *Sky Pilot* (Giles 1932, CRS F1 38/534), but towards the end of 1932 rumours of bizarre conduct at Roper River mission had come to the attention of the Chief Protector, Cecil Cook. It is not my intention in this book to evaluate the truth or otherwise of the allegations made against Langford Smith. The ensuing publicity generated by the Langford Smith enquiry, the killings of the Japanese and the *Douglas Mawson* rumours, had the effect in the Northern Territory of focussing hostility between the Territory Administration and the mission, and nationally, of making Arnhem Land seem a place where extraordinary events were commonplace.

Towards the end of 1932, Langford Smith was accused of sexual impropriety with one of his charges, a Yolngu woman, Rachel Minimere. The story was reported to Cook by police at Roper Bar after a Yolngu, Caleb Minimere, delivered a note from Langford Smith stating that the bearer was mad and dangerous. When this was explained to Minimere, he countered with claims of sexual immorality between Langford and his wife, Rachel (Cook 1932, CRS F1 38/534). Cook took this sufficiently seriously to take the necessary steps for a Government Board of Enquiry which was held in 1933. The results were never made public and no charges were laid but Langford Smith was dismissed by the CMS (Harris 1990, 732). The case achieved some notoriety after Harold Nelson, the Northern Territory Member for the House of Representatives, made allegations of 'rape, immorality, abortion and the spreading of venereal disease' in a statement in the House (*Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates* 1932, 4120).

The CMS publicly disassociated itself from the imputations made against Langford Smith (Cole 1985, 74). Langford Smith's father, Canon Langford Smith, issued a statement pointing out that no charges had been made and suggesting that the whole case arose as a result of bias against missions generally (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 June 1935). The Society maintained and continues to maintain that the charges against Langford Smith were fabricated and 'probably a product of vengeance' (Claydon D, 1992, pers comm, 20 March). Prominent Anglican officials within the CMS who had opportunity to discuss the matter with Langford Smith assert his innocence (Claydon 1992, pers comm, 11 March; Butler 1992, interview, 11 March).

The full details of the allegations against Langford Smith have never been made public and no copies of the report of the enquiry appear to be now in existence. It cannot be found in any of the Australian Archives files in Darwin or Canberra where it would be reasonable to expect it (CRS A1 33/8459; CRS A432 34/203; CRS A659 41/1118; CRS F1 38/534), although much of the related correspondence is there. Members of the CMS believe that the report was suppressed because the allegations could not be substantiated (Claydon D, 1992, pers comm, 20 March). The Northern Territory Administration maintained Langford Smith's guilt (Asche 1934, CRS A659 41/1118) and used the controversy as an excuse to withdraw the subsidy and attempted to close down Roper mission on the grounds of 'public health' and general mismanagement (Brown 1943, CRS F1 38/534; Harris 1990, 732).

Notwithstanding the poor publicity following the Board of Enquiry, the Federal Government remained willing to follow the recommendations of the Bleakley report and leave the administration of Arnhem Land to the missionaries. Despite the public exposure of the difficulties experienced by both the CMS and the MMS, the economic advantages of having the work done and paid for by religious groups easily outweighed any of the day-to-day problems which emerged. Not only did the Church pay for the experiment but they could be made to take the blame when it went wrong.

The news of the deaths of the Japanese trepang crews, the mystery of the supposed survivors of the Douglas Mawson and the allegations of misconduct against both missionary societies during this period ensured that Arnhem Land became clearly established in the minds of Australians as a wild frontier. The Federal Government appeared content to let the missions continue the task of administering the area. That confidence was to be shaken all too soon.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE EAST ARNHAM LAND KILLINGS

*Far away in Arnhem Land
An old, grey buck harangues his band,
A seer who's been on "walk-about"
To puzzle white men's wisdom out.
Now he is seeking to describe
Strange happenings to his wondering tribe-
Tales of a queer contagion spread
That makes men "sick alonga head."*

*"Depreshum, white man say, he come,
Bime-by, all happy fella glum.
White-man, him catch-um plenty meat,
Catch plenty tucker, no can eat.
All talk-um peace, but make-um war-
No feller man he know what for.
S'pose, maybe, teach black man that trick?
Ah! ... Tink-it better spear-um quick."
(Melbourne Herald 6 October 1933).*

On 17 September 1932 five Japanese trepang fishermen, Tanaka, Kimishima, Shibasaki, Inamori and Higasaki, were killed by the Yolngu in the Caledon Bay area. In the middle of the Dry season of the following year, two itinerants, Fagan and Traynor, were killed on Woodah Island. Soon after, on 1 August 1933, Police Constable McColl was killed on Woodah Island where he had been investigating the deaths of the Japanese.

The news of the killing of the Japanese by the Caledon Bay Yolngu was reported back to Darwin by eyewitnesses. In 1932 an Englishman, Fred Gray, had been collecting trepang around the Arnhem Land coast in his lugger, *Northam*, and landing at Caledon Bay at the end of August (Gray 1932, 26 August Diary, FGPP). Gray noted that the Caledons arrived soon after and built a camp next to his. The Yolngu did much of the work harvesting and processing the trepang, 'in exchange for goods & food' (Gray 1932, 3 September, Diary, FGPP).



3 Fred Gray on the Northam 1932, FGPP



4 Joe McGinnes, Fred Gray and Pangl Corri on the Northam 1932, FGPP

Conversations were conducted between the two groups through the intermediary of an Aboriginal crewman and a Borroloola woman, Dillyara 'Clara', who was living with the Caledons and could speak some English. The most influential member of the Caledons appeared to be an elderly patriarch called Wongo (Wonggu, Ongoo, Wongo etc) who had many wives and children. His son Natchelma was married to Clara.

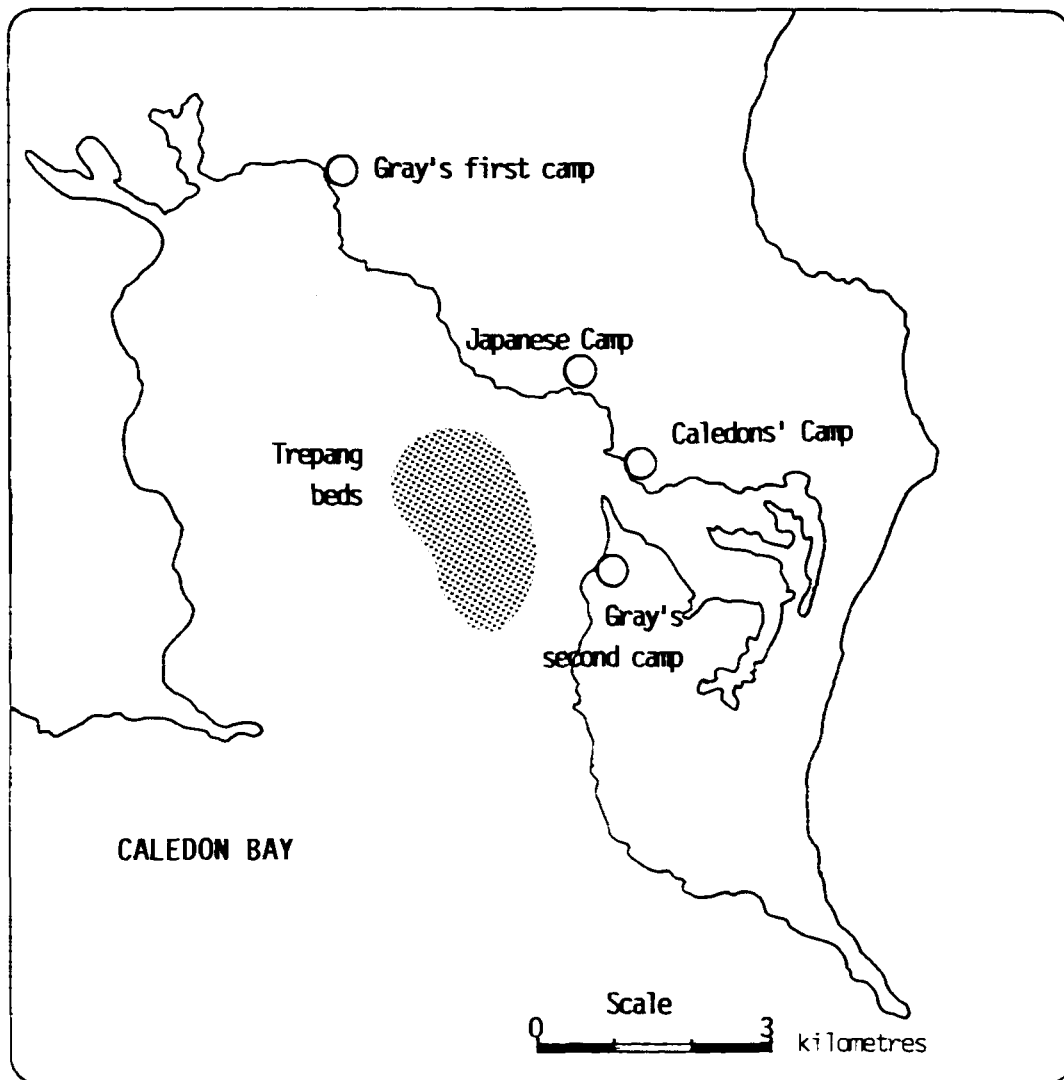
On 4 September two luggers sailed into Caledon Bay. They were the *Myrtle Olga* and the *Raff* from Kepert's pearling fleet based in Darwin and operated by Japanese and Aboriginal crews. The Caledon Bay Yolngu and the Japanese crews had coincidentally met earlier that year.

When the Japs were in Port Bradshaw earlier in 1932 they fired at several Blacks there namely Jerring, Dougagee, Manimba, Nanyin, Wadjung, Tama & Bunungo. The Japs who fired were Tanakee & the Jap without teeth. The Japs also fight with Bunungo, Dongattee & Mattaman with their fists (Gray nd c1934a, FGPP).

The Japanese crews eventually set up camp at Caledon Bay although they appeared anxious about the Yolngu and asked the *Northam* crew to 'camp by them' (Gray 1932, 7 September Diary, FGPP). Gray decided to move camp, however, about 2 km along the bay so that they would not all be working the same trepang beds. Map 3 shows the relative positions of the camps as indicated to me in 1988 by Gray from a sketch map drawn from aerial photographs.

One evening, some days after Gray had settled in at the new camp site, he heard the sound of rifle shots from the Japanese camp. Gray visited the Japanese camp a few days later and one of the Japanese crew, Kimishima, told Gray: 'he had fired at the natives who had come from my camp as he had too many boys already. He had also lost a Panikin [sic] & one Tomahawk. Of course, Kimishima said, I fired to miss them, I only want to frighten them away' (Gray 1932, 16 September Diary, FGPP).

But some of the Caledons complained to Gray on his way to visit the Japanese. Nanyin, brother of Gray's cook Narritjan, said: ' "Tell police in Darwin, Jap been shooting at us" (he ducked) "this is how I dodge the bullets" ' (Gray 1932, 16 September Diary, FGPP). Gray spent that evening with both parties, having supper with the Japanese and spending some further time with Wongo at the Caledon camp as it was high tide and he had to wait for the dinghy to return to his camp.



Map 3 Relative positions of trepang camps at Caledon Bay, September 1932, based on annotated aerial photographs and hand drawn sketches made by Fred Gray

The next day one of Gray's crew, Ramon Arabina, went down to the Caledon camp to begin work but at the Japanese camp he could see:

a commotion on the beach. He heard shots fired & could see spears flying through the air. He saw a Jap fall from a dinghy into the water and another running away in company with some blacks. Some of the natives rowed over to the Japanese boats while he was still quite close & called out to him to join them. He could see that even the lubras & picanninies [sic] were in the attacking party ...

Arabina reported that the blacks were in possession of the boats & were unloading the stores into the dinghys ... The blacks [Goulburn Island crew] reported that they had warned the Japanese what was coming as the Caledon Bay boys said that no Trepang was going out of Caledon Bay. That they were going to kill the Japanese (Gray 1932, 17 September Diary, FGPP).

Gray and the rest of his crew went around the bay towards the Japanese camp, first by dinghy and then on foot to find scenes of great confusion as the Japanese boats were looted and guns fired indiscriminately. When Gray and the others were able to approach the beach safely they came across the body of Kimishima near the Caledon camp, two other dead Japanese were lying near their camp and the body of another, Tanaka, was found in the water. They could not find the bodies of the engineer or Kinjo although they searched for some time. Kinjo escaped overland to Milingimbi mission with some of the Goulburn Island crew. The body of the engineer was discovered on the beach the next day (Gray 1932, 17 September Diary, FGPP). Gray and the *Northam* crew photographed the scene, buried the bodies and then sailed the *Myrtle Olga* and *Raff* back towards Darwin to report the story at the first opportunity. The site of the killings was located on the western side of Caledon Bay by Patrol Officer Brian Greenfield in 1954 (see Long 1992, figure 4).

The question which has been of lingering controversy in subsequent analyses of the massacre at Caledon Bay is that of motive. Why did the Caledons kill the Japanese? Gray had lived with the Caledons for some time before the killing, and apart from a stray shot fired at him in the general confusion (for which the offender was punished by being speared in the leg by another man), appeared to have been in no danger. Gray commented several times on the great fear that the Japanese felt for the Caledons, and noted also that they were very lavish with 'gifts' for the Yolngu workers (Gray, *Melbourne Herald* 12 October 1933).

At the trial the witness, Wollaware, gave evidence through an interpreter and told this story:

The Japanese were bad people. They been whip witness, Mow, old man Nikolo and others. The Japanese been thrash aboriginals for nothing. The natives worked for the Japanese and went diving to get trepang. Four lubras went looking for oysters. The Japanese took fish net and bag and went along the reef. The natives

afterwards heard shots fired and saw a woman running away and got frightened and went ashore to where the old men were. Asked what the matter one old man said that the Japanese had got his wife. He wanted to know what to do; if they did not kill the Japanese they would be killed themselves. Three boys got spears and went along to the Japanese camp to make a noise. Watchelma speared a Japanese tender in the back with a stone spear. Mow speared another Japanese and Wuninga speared the Japanese cook (Northern Standard 1 June 1934).

Nanyin (Nanyan) gave similar evidence, that a council of Caledon Yolngu had declared, 'All right, we be killem' (Northern Standard 1 June 1934).

Harry, a Yolngu from Milingimbi mission, who was the chief interpreter, had a slightly different story involving both insult and sexual abuse which he said he had been told:

The Japanese told Noming to get firewood for the boiler. Noming did not understand English and the Japanese struck him. Noming got the firewood but was again assaulted. The Japanese knocked him along the trepang guts [sic] and rub the trepang along his face. Noming did not retaliate. A toothless Japanese cook hit Noming in the back with a stick. Other natives were assaulted ... Some boys came from Fred Gray's camp and Watchelma tried to break up some tobacco. A Japanese got a revolver and shot at him but missed ... The Japanese got the women to look for oysters ... The natives saw the Japanese ... sneak along the reef. The natives saw one women come out of the bush. Hearing a shout they thought something had happened ... The Japanese got out a revolver, when he saw Watchelma, who said, 'Trouble been happen. One Japanese got woman to do wrong.' The Japanese came after Watchelma and took more women and locked them up along smoke house. Watchelma protested telling the Japanese 'Suppose I steal anything from you you killem me, what you do with women? That's not right.' The Japanese fired six revolver shots at him but missed. He retained possession of the women, Watchelma looking after the children. The natives discussed the matter, some advising killing and cutting up the Japanese, others a consultation with Fred Gray or the Methodist missionaries at Goulburn Island (Northern Standard 1 June 1934).

The Berndts' informants, Naradjin (Narachan, Narritjan etc) and Djinini, also mentioned the throwing of trepang refuse at an old man (Berndt & Berndt 1954, 158-60). Ted Egan was told a similar story by a Yolngu informant who had been a child at the time, that Wongo had been dumped headfirst into a cauldron of trepang offal (Egan 1989).

Kinjo, the only survivor, told yet another story. He denied any involvement with Yolngu women and, in contradiction to Kimishima's story, denied firing at the Yolngu:

All the time we were there we never met any of their lubras. They were in a separate camp, and if any of them saw us they would run bush.

We never fired one shot on shore. It is not right that we fired to frighten the Caledons. We were too busy working trepang even to go shooting duck. The only time we fired our shotguns was from the boat when we were cleaning them (Melbourne Herald 12 October 1933).

It is generally assumed that the motive for the killing of the Japanese was that they had forced the Caledon women into sexual involvement with them. Novelist Ion Idriess put it dramatically: "The Japanese have my women" roared Wonggu. "They have stolen four of my wives; one has not returned. Kill them!" (Idriess 1938, 241). But others, either directly or by implication (Berndt & Berndt 1954, 160; Cole 1984, 32; McKenzie 1976, 68; Pike 1972, 354) have also arrived at that conclusion as well as the government reports and commentaries of the time (Brennan 1936, CRS A432 35/646; Kirkland 1935, CRS F1 36/386).

This assumption may not be justified. It is possible that later writers uncritically used evidence tendered during the trial without analysing the context in which such evidence was elicited. It must be taken into account that in the same year, immediately prior to the trial of the Caledons for the killing of the Japanese, there had been an equally well publicised trial resulting from the fatal shooting of a European man for having sexual intercourse with an Aboriginal woman. Exactly one year after Tuckiar was alleged to have killed McColl, Butcher Knight, an Aborigine from the Alligator Rivers region, was convicted for the double murder of an Aboriginal woman, Copper, and European man, William Jennings, on a buffalo shooting camp on the Mary River. Butcher shot them both with a single bullet as they lay together under their mosquito net. Butcher was sentenced to death, but the sentence

was later commuted to life imprisonment. Although Judge Wells (who was also the presiding judge in the Caledon case) condemned this leniency on the rather dubious grounds that it would lead to 'reprisals' by whites (Wells 1934, 2-3, CRS A432 34/1437), a considerable section of the population was sympathetic to the notion of Aboriginal retaliation against Europeans who had uninvited sexual relations with Aboriginal women. The missions and church groups in southern states were successful in generating an awareness in the public mind that Aboriginal men were to some extent justified in both violently resisting and avenging the sexual exploitation of their wives. This interpretation was attractive to many Europeans and tended to be applied in situations even when the facts suggested other possibilities. In the Butcher Knight case, the murdered woman had no kin or affinal relationship with him and in fact came from a completely different area and language group. Retribution by Aboriginal husbands for the outrage of having non-Aboriginal men molest their womenfolk however was grounds that Europeans could understand, particularly as such sexual relations were in fact illegal in the Northern Territory at that time. In the case of the Caledon Bay killings where the offenders were Japanese rather than European, popular opinion held that right was on the side of the Aborigine if it could be shown he acted in defence of his women.

But was this interpretation of events justified in the Caledon Bay case? The evidence for believing that the Japanese had forced sexual liaisons with the Caledon women is generated from two sources. Firstly, from the statements made by some of the Caledons at the trial and secondly from a comment made by Fred Gray. Looking at the evidence from the trial and that given to the newspapers, it is apparent that no two witnesses told the same story or gave exactly the same reasons for the killings. The evidence of the Caledons was always taken through interpreters and the interpreters were Yolngu, educated and resident at Milingimbi mission. Public awareness and sympathy towards Aboriginal men resisting the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women is not to be underestimated. Nor is it valid to assume that the Yolngu themselves were unaware of such sympathy. The only evidence that can clearly be verified is that Gray heard shooting from the Japanese camp which he noted in his diary (Gray 1932, 11 September Diary, FGPP) and that he recorded two days later that the Yolngu had complained to him that the Japanese had been firing at them (Gray 1932, 13 September Diary, FGPP). These entries were made prior to the massacre. These facts were also denied by Kinjo it should be

remembered. If the Caledons had had cause to complain that the Japanese were sexually abusing the women, why was it not mentioned then?

Gray's evidence is inconsistent. His statements to the newspapers at the time attest that he did not believe the Japanese were involved with any of the women. He stated: 'I am certain they made no attempts to buy or interfere with the lubras, as I would certainly have heard about it from the chief' (*Melbourne Herald* 12 October 1933). He reasoned that firstly the Japanese were frightened by the Caledons, too frightened to put themselves into a vulnerable situation and that secondly he would have been told if it had happened.

Keith Cole has quoted Gray as stating that the Japanese had taken some women and locked them in the smokehouse for sex (Cole 1984, 32). Cole's evidence is derived from some notes that Gray made (Gray nd c1934a, FGPP) at Caledon Bay in February 1934 after his ship lost a mast (*Northern Standard* 9 March 1934) and he was stranded 'on a beach a few miles about [sic] Blue Mud Bay' (Gray nd c1934b, FGPP). Camped behind the beach, Gray passed the time talking to the Caledons or writing, including a number of stories. In the story 'A moonlight night' for example, Gray gives his version of the *Douglas Mawson* as the Caledons told it. One woman who survived became pregnant to an Aboriginal man, who fatally speared her in the latter stages of pregnancy: 'Why she was speared my informant did not know! "blacks often kill one of there [sic] women in a moment of rage" he said' (Gray nd c1934b, FGPP). It is extremely unlikely that the above story is an account of actual events and other stories collected by Gray at this time must also be carefully analysed. In fact Gray's boat was not beached at Blue Mud Bay but at Trial Bay, just south of Caledon Bay. But it was only after this trip that Gray first mentioned sexual abuse of Yolngu women by the Japanese, some seventeen months after the event. At no time prior to this does Gray mention a sexual motive in the killings, referring only to the threatening of the Caledons with firearms as the possible reason.

This is the story Gray was told on the beach at Trial Bay in 1934:

The Japanese incurred the enmity of the Blacks through firing at Nome & Womgo, & then by firing at Natchelma, Mowanboy, Marata & Nanyin. The cause of the first firing was by Inamorie who had been often after one of Womgo's women. Womgo went to the Japanese camp & started to row with Inamorie. Womgo had a

spear in his hand. Inamoré fired at Wongoe [sic] & was then held back by some Melville Island natives. Wornogoe was prevented from throwing his spear by his women folk. The second firing was by the same Jap & was directed at Natchelma, Mowanboy, Nanyin & Marata with the intention of driving them away evidently. The Japs told them to go back to Gray's camp & as they did not do so were fired on. The blacks ran away. This was the day before the five Japs were killed. Previously the Japs had hit two of the Caledons with their fists which had also antagonised the Blacks. The morning of the killing the Japs were working on the beach with the exception of Inamoré who was in the kitchen. Inamoré was attacked first by Taureeyununu [hard to read the writing]. Natchelma speared Kimishima who afterwards swam away & eventually died on the beach some half mile away. Narkays speared Tanaka as he was pushing a dinghy out in the water. Higashi was speared by Nome who, has been since killed himself. ? Jap without teeth was killed by Mow with a spear each man threw more than one spear. The Caledons now have no spears left and Miricartoo, (since killed) chased Kinjue throwing stones at him, Kinjue gets away (Gray nd c1934a, FGPP).

This description of the killing of the Japanese by the Caledon warriors does not tally with Ramon Arabina's. Arabina talked about a 'commotion' on the beach, with people looting boats and unloading stores, exhorting him to join in, the women and children as well 'in the attacking party' (Gray 1932, 17 September Diary, FGPP). This discrepancy could be accounted for in the fact that Ramon Arabina was an outsider and may not have been aware of exactly what was going on during the attack.

It is possible that Gray's informants in 1934 gave sexual abuse as the catalyst resulting in the killings of the Japanese by the Caledons not only because this motive was seen to have been accepted by Europeans but also because by the time Gray was collecting this account a further series of killings had taken place in the same area.

In each instance, retribution for sexual interference with women was probably the motive. It was this sequel which brought about a change in the reported motives of the killings at Caledon Bay.

Towards the end of 1932 Frank Traynor, a hairdresser from Sydney, and William Fagan, an unskilled labourer from Tasmania, left Darwin

in a small open boat intending to travel to Thursday Island (*Sydney Morning Herald* 29 September 1933). Fred Gray was travelling towards Rapuma Island off Milingimbi in February, when he was hailed by a Yolngu in a canoe from the mission with a letter from Webb asking him to return to Milingimbi on a matter of some importance. Arriving at Milingimbi Gray found 'two strangers there who are endeavouring to reach Thursday Island in a Cutter. They left Darwin last October. We offer to tow them a part of the way which they gladly accept' (Gray 1933, 23 February Diary, FGPP). Webb had asked Gray to call in in an effort to persuade Fagan and Traynor not to proceed as they were inadequately equipped and had little knowledge of the region. Webb and Gray failed to change their plans. Webb assisted them by giving food and tobacco and Gray donated a compass and a copy of a chart (Gray 1984, 7 June interview). Gray towed them east past Elcho Island. There they picked up the Yolngu man, Harry, who also advised Fagan and Traynor to turn back. Advice which they again ignored. Gray wrote in his diary: 'Fagan and Traynor leave us today. I think that they will never reach their destination & tell them so. Boat in bad order & leaking but think more danger from blacks' (Gray 1933, 1 March Diary, FGPP). At their parting, Gray warned them again of the dangers of becoming involved with the Yolngu. The elder of the two men answered: 'One white man is worth sixty natives!' (Gray 1984, 7 June interview).

Fagan and Traynor never reached Thursday Island. They sailed east around the coast until they reached Woodah Island, some time before July 1933. A witness at the trial, Parraner (Parriner), a Bickerton Islander, told this story through an interpreter:

Tuckiar and Merara been come up and talk at Bickerton Island. They been say it good news ... Tuckiar said boat been come and Tuckiar and Merara been look. Two white men been on boat. Tuckiar been get canoe and been go boat have look at men. Men been talk. "You come here we give you job. We give you tomahawk you go catchem wood." Tuckiar and Merara been cut wood and take it alonga boat. The white men been talk "We give you tobacco you two fella been get another load." Tuckiar and Merara then had dinner on the boat. After dinner two fellow been get some more wood and bring it to the boat. The two men been say, "We two fella want lubra." Tuckiar and Merara said they would go to the camp and tell the lubra to come up and they brought them back to the boat. The two white men been give accused two sticks of tobacco. The accused then went back to the camp, the two lubras being left

on the boat. When they returned to camp they said to the other natives, "We left the lubras alonga boat. The two men got the lubras and we go after them at piccaninny daylight." (Northern Standard 3 August 1934).

Parraner's account differs somewhat from the other account given at the trial, that of Harry from Milingimbi mission. Harry said that he had been told the following story by the accused:

Merara told me he saw a boat. The boat came along and anchored this side of Groote Island ... After the boat anchored Merara told me he caught a canoe and went out to the boat. White man give him tobacco and told him to go ashore for wood. They got into canoe and went ashore for wood. The two white men walk round on beach. The two white men went to the camp and got two girls and took them to the beach and on to the boat. Merara said when he came to the beach he saw the girls on the boat. He got a canoe and loaded up some wood. Tuckiar got a firestick and gave the news to the camp. He went back to the canoe ... Merara jumped aboard! [Fagan and Traynor's boat] He talk to girl, "Get up and come quick. The two white man been do wrong." (Northern Standard 3 August 1934).

The difference between the stories of Parraner and Harry is considerable and it is to be regretted that neither Tuckiar nor Merara were able to make a statement. In court, Dyer stated: 'I never at any time had any direct conversation with the two accused. We talked to them through interpreters' (*Northern Standard* 3 August 1934). Clearly Harry's story of Fagan and Traynor's abduction of the two women would engender more sympathy towards Tuckiar and Merara than Parriner's.

Whatever the details, it seems clear that Fagan and Traynor were having sexual relations with the Woodah Island women, whether forcibly or for payment, and this fact was a major contributing factor to the attack and their subsequent deaths. Early that particular morning, Tuckiar, Merara and another man, Jimbarion, paddled out to the boat where the women were on board and in the ensuing fight, Fagan and Traynor were knocked overboard and died in the struggle (*Melbourne Herald* 26 July 1934; *Northern Standard* 3 August 1934).

This account was collected through an interpreter by the missionary Dyer, on his way back to Darwin with the suspects:

Takera, Marara & Jimbarion then set out for the boat which was anchored some distance from the shore; in a canoe; to fetch them back. Boarding the boat Marara looked into the cabin & saw the men with their wives. One of the men Jumped [sic] out & hit Marara over the head with a paddle ... They had no spears to kill so it was a hand to hand fight ... This blow knocked him overboard partly stunning him. Jimbarion pulled him into the canoe he picked up a piece of the firewood & threw it ... and hit one of them on the back of the head knocking him overboard, he started to swim to the shore ... It was a very rough day he sank & floated ashore two days later. Takera & the other man had a tussle on the boat, & he threw him overboard as he fell his head struck the side of the boat, he sank & they did not see him again. The next day they brought the boat ashore (Dyer nd c1934, CRS A452 53/106).

These events only became known to the authorities in Darwin much later. Gray was the last European to see the two men alive in March and he and Webb were probably the only non-Aborigines who knew they were in Arnhem Land. Police in Darwin were aware though of the killings at Caledon Bay and had made several efforts to apprehend the suspects.

After the news of the Japanese deaths became public, an overland police expedition was organised by Police Constables Heathcock and Hales to apprehend the suspects. Because the country was so rough and support so difficult to organise, it was a foot patrol covering more than 400 km (*Melbourne Herald* 21 December 1933). In the whole patrol: 'They didn't see a native, but the natives saw them' (Gray 1984, 11 October interview). Gray's account differs from Police Constable Vic Hall's narrative which included such details as a tribal fight and killing by Aboriginal Police Aide Tracker Pat, and a confrontation of 'eighty warriors, under a forest of "killing spears"' (Hall 1967, 47) which forced the police party to flee for their lives. Heathcock is quoted as saying, 'it's war. If we wait. Which we're not going to' (Hall 1967, 48). Neither Gray nor Hall were actual eyewitnesses, but Gray's informants were the Caledons, and presumably Hall's informants were Heathcock and Hales.

After the failure of the first patrol, a much larger expedition was organised from Darwin. As the approach from land had proved unsuccessful, it was thought that Groote Eylandt would make a good base for operations and use of the mission launch *Hope* was negotiated. Constables Morey and Mahoney with four Aboriginal police trackers left Roper River on 4 July 1933 while Constables McColl and Hall and two Aboriginal police trackers left for Groote Eylandt mission. The two parties met north of the Koolatong River on 26 July (*Northern Standard* 29 August 1933) where the combined forces of Police Constables Morey, Mahoney, Hall and McColl together with the Aboriginal Police Trackers Paddy (Big Pat), Roper Tommy, Menikman, Locke, Dick and Whispering Reuban began the search for the killers of the Japanese. They began, ignorant of the killing of Fagan and Traynor probably only weeks earlier, on Woodah Island.

They landed on Woodah Island in the evening of 31 July. The next day the party 'left the police launch with four trackers to try and make contact with some niggers ... to make enquiries' (*Northern Standard* 3 August 1934). After walking into the centre of the island, a recently deserted camp was found. The Aboriginal police discovered tracks and four women were found and questioned (*Northern Standard* 29 August 1933). The party separated when a report was brought:

that natives were landing in a canoe on a point near by and three of the constables and two trackers set off to intercept them. McColl and two trackers were left at the camp with the lubras, who were first unfettered (Gavan Duffy et al nd c1934, 2, CRS A1 36/4022).

Finding the report was false, Constables Morey, Hall and Mahoney returned some time later to where they had left McColl. On the way Mahoney felt they were being watched. A spear was thrown at him which took off his hat (*Northern Standard* 29 August 1933) and he fired several shots which went wild. On return to the site where they had left the others:

the two trackers were found at the camp, but neither McColl nor the lubras were there. Next morning McColl's dead body was found about four hundred yards away from the camp with a spear wound in his chest and a blood stained spear lying a few paces from it. McColl's pistol showed that he had fired three times, his third shot having been a misfire (Gavan Duffy et al nd c1934, 2, CRS A1 36/4022).

What had happened to McColl, the two Aboriginal police and the women while Morey, Hall and Mahoney were away? How did McColl become separated from the others? There were several stories told at the trial to explain what happened, but none of them were totally satisfactory. None of the women were called as witnesses and Tuckiar was not able to make a statement. During the course of the trial, two different stories emerged.

The story which was accepted as true by Judge Wells was told by Parraner from Bickerton Island. He said with Paddy (Big Pat) acting as interpreter:

I been camped at Bickerton Island when two fella been come up. Tuckiar and Wondercul been come up. I been ask Tuckiar and Wondercul, "What you been do." Tuckiar been talk: - Policeman been chasem all about Tuckiar mob. Three four policemen been come up there and sit down. Policeman been all sit down along shade. Tuckiar sing out. Nobody answer me I go close up come out from the jungle I look, all about sit down. I go get close up all about policeman boy get up. See me. They been chasem me. I go inside along jungle. I see another man go past along jungle. I shiften little bit long way I sit down quiet. I hear lubra sing out for me. Lubra sing out again and I hittem stick. That lubra talk "I bring em up one man." The lubra come close up then. Tuckiar puttem woomera long spear. "I want to killem that man," him been talk along finger. "Give me room along that man, I want to kill him." Alright policeman get up. He been chuckem spear straight away ... On the way to Darwin in the boat Tuckiar been talk, "All my own fault because I kill policeman. I go along Darwin." (Northern Standard 7 August 1934).

But this story does not explain why McColl and one of the women had become separated from the others. The other problem with Parraner's evidence was that it was translated by a man working for the Police: 'Tracker Paddy' is one and the same as 'Interpreter Paddy' (Northern Standard 7 August 1934)! Gray recalled seeing Parraner and Paddy in earnest conversation from the verandah of the courthouse, where Paddy was striking his fists together for emphasis. Gray believed Paddy was instructing Parraner as to what story should be told in court (Gray 1988, 29 April interview).

Constable Hall some years later wrote a rather fanciful account of the death of McColl entitled *Dreamtime Justice* describing it in terms of black magic. One of the trackers, Roper Tommy, is described talking to Paddy (Big Pat):

"I have dreamed." Then Roper Tommy spoke again, his voice a little stronger. "One of our policemen will die. It was not shown which."

Harshly, with shocked surprise, Big Pat spoke. "One of our white men will die? You grow old, Djuluma. We have minded many policemen and none have died ... The Maluka policeman Makkol [McColl] is my boss and my tribal brother, as all men know ... I will kill for him." (Hall 1962, 34).

This is probably poetic license, but even apart from any friendship Tracker Paddy may have had with McColl, Paddy was working for the Police and it would be unlikely that he would have kept working if he had told a story resembling Dyer's version of Tuckiar's account. McColl had arrived in Darwin from Melbourne a little over a year before and was a married man and the Police, then as now, would have felt an obligation to protect the reputations of their officers, particularly those killed in the course of duty.

The other narrative of the killing of McColl has two slightly different versions. Firstly there are the accounts collected by the missionaries Warren and Dyer as they sailed back to Darwin on the last leg of the Peace Expedition, and then there is the version summarised in the appeal to the Supreme Court to quash the death sentence on Tuckiar. Substantially they are the same. Dyer's account:

One policeman is left in camp with Taker's young lubra, he has three wives he said. Taker comes to look at the camp but cannot see anyone. He looks further and sees this policeman away from the camp in the scrub she is calling out for help. He finds them in the act of intercourse with his wife. We charge how important it is that he tells us truly through Harry, he said it is true, he saw it with his eye, pointing to it. He hid behind a tree watching. As he did up his clothes he Taker showed himself to take her away. The policeman fires three shots at him & when he stops to attend to his gun, he throws the spear that kills him ... The spear hit him in the chest ... he pulled out the spear & went a little way & fell down (Dyer nd c1934, CRS A1 36/4022).

The version told at the appeal differs only slightly:

he [Tuckiar] returned to the jungle, that then hearing the cry of a baby, he looked and saw a white man and a lubra stop, that the white man had sexual relations with the lubra, after which the lubra picked up the baby and both returned to the open space, that the prisoner then communicated by signs with the lubra ... that the white man saw him, and thereupon he asked by signs for tobacco, that the white man then fired at him three times and reloaded ... the white man fired again and the prisoner threw his spear and hit him (Gavan Duffy et al nd c1934, CRS A1 36/4022).

Both accounts suggest that McColl fired first and that Tuckiar threw the spear in self-defence. The first trial however resulted in a denial of natural justice for the accused for a number of reasons. Fitzgerald, who was representing Tuckiar, almost outdid the prosecution in his efforts to convict Tuckiar. After the verdict had been passed but before sentence pronounced, Fitzgerald made the extraordinary statement that after consultation with his client: 'he was in a predicament, the worst predicament that he had encountered in all his legal career' (*Commonwealth Law Reports* 1934-35, 354), the inference being that his client had admitted guilt. Further, he went on to say that he had thought it inadvisable that Tuckiar take the stand himself. Judge Wells agreed with Fitzgerald that he had taken the best course of action: 'otherwise it would have given ignorant, malicious, and irresponsible persons in other parts of Australia an opportunity to malign a dead man' (*Northern Standard* 5 August 1934). At the appeal of the conviction, Chief Justice Sir Frank Gavan Duffy found Judge Wells's decision to refuse to allow Tuckiar to take the stand: 'clear misdirection and one which ... was calculated gravely to prejudice the prisoner'. Further, Judge Wells's decision to allow a character witness to appear for McColl as evidence when it was Tuckiar who was standing trial, 'clearly should have been disallowed' (Gavan Duffy et al nd c1934, 2, CRS A1 36/4022). The appeal was successful and as the Appellate court found a new trial impossible under conditions fair to the accused in the light of the publicity, the conviction was quashed.

The sequence of the killings at Woodah Island following the massacres at Caledon Bay is documented incorrectly by the majority of Territory historians who have published on this area (Berndt & Berndt 1954, 134; Cole 1984, 36; Cole 1985, 93) who assert that the killing of McColl took place before the killing of Fagan and Traynor. It is clear that Fagan and Traynor were killed prior to McColl (Carrodus, 1934, 3,

CRS A1 36/4022). Fagan and Traynor's deaths were a contributory factor in the death of McColl and not simply an unrelated act of aggression towards non-Aboriginal incursion.

The news of the deaths at Caledon Bay and Woodah Island focussed the attention of the print media of Australia on Arnhem Land. The Yolngu from Caledon Bay, the so-called 'Balamumu', were reported to be on the warpath to kill all outsiders for trespass on Aboriginal land.



Figure 2 Sample headlines from some of the larger southern dailies, September 1933

Although there had been other killings of Japanese in this area in the 1920s (Morey 1933a, CRS A452 53/106), the presence of European witnesses brought far greater publicity to the proceedings. These events were reported in a sensational fashion by the press which fuelled an emotional response from the public. Newspaper headlines such as 'Australia faces "Black war"' (*Daily Herald* 11 September 1933) and 'Massacre of whites in Arnhem Land feared' (*Melbourne Herald* 8 September 1933) caused the populace, both local and

southern, to re-think their attitudes to Aborigines in general and opinion was polarised between those calling for a reprisal and those who viewed the tragedy with remorse. This persistence in describing the events at Caledon Bay and Woodah Island in terms of a pan-Arnhem Land territorial resistance to a non-Aboriginal presence continues up to the present day (eg Robinson & York 1977, 108, 109).

This then was the sequence of events which the newspapers called the 'Black War'. Caledon Bay Yolngu had already met with the crews of the *Myrtle Olga* and the *Raff* at Port Bradshaw earlier in 1932 where there had been considerable friction in their relationships. At this time the Japanese had both fired on the Yolngu and beaten them with their fists. By coincidence, these same crews called in at Caledon Bay about six months later to find the Caledons had remembered. The Japanese were nervous and kept rifles at the ready and indeed used them to control the Caledons. The Caledons, resentful at the bullying and physical coercion, responded violently by waiting in ambush in the early morning. White Australia guiltily spoke of invasion and sexual abuse of Aboriginal women, but the evidence points to physical aggression and abuse of labour on the part of the Japanese as the primary motive. Fagan and Traynor, ignorant and ill prepared, were killed because of the sexual abuse of women. But what strange fate prompted Police Constable McColl to arrive at the same place and become separated from the party with the wife of the same man who had helped to kill Fagan and Traynor?

Popularist accounts refer euphemistically but chastely to McColl being 'lured' away and state that the other women 'vanished', without coming to terms with the reality of the situation (for example, Idriess 1938, 282-3). Ted Egan interviewed Tuckiar's wife, Japarri, just before her death and questioned her about whether sexual intercourse had taken place. Japarri apparently stated clearly that it had not (Egan 1989). But whether a male questioner would receive an accurate answer to such an intimate question after Japarri had been living for some forty years at the Methodist Mission at Yirrkala seems doubtful. McColl's behaviour in separating himself and another woman from the rest of the party is difficult to explain as it was surely both dangerous and failing in the duty with which he was charged, that is, the guarding of all the women.

The reticence in dealing with the McColl case is predictable, but what about the others? The newspaper reporting, the emotional responses of both Territorians and southerners, the hasty slipshod way the trial was conducted with its notable lack of crucial witnesses and

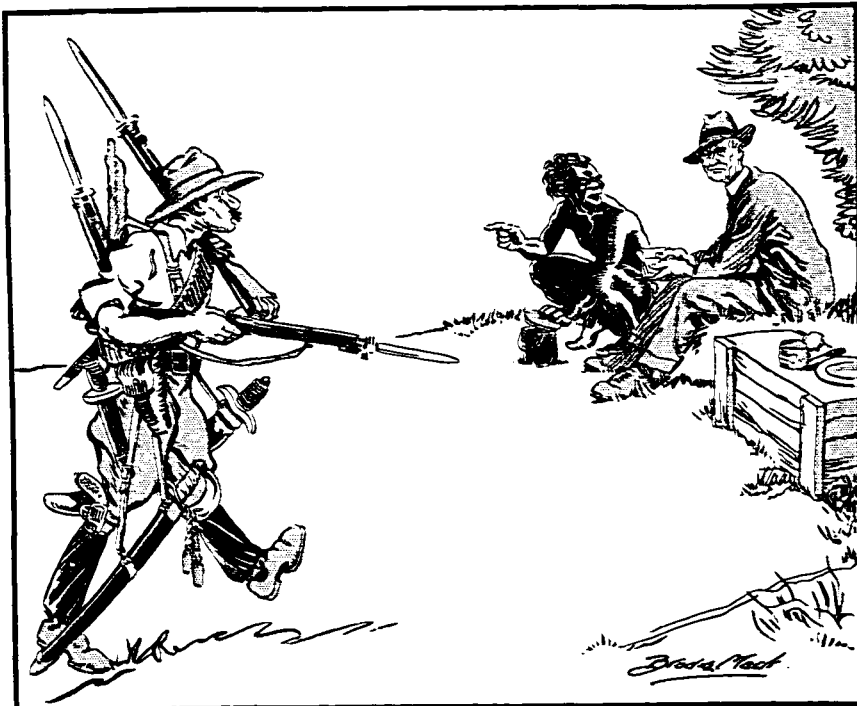
interpreters, and the general mood of white Australians towards the Aborigines, all combined to create generalisations about the killings with little examination of the specific situation of each case. Against this background of emotionalism and ignorance, a strong groundswell began from southern Australia demanding justice for Aborigines in Arnhem Land. The killings were perceived both as an act of retaliation against encroachment by non-Aboriginal people into an Aboriginal domain and retribution for the sexual abuse of Aboriginal women. This view was perhaps more appealing because the victims in these cases were either Japanese, poor itinerants, or police. None of these sections of the Australian community commanded much public sympathy or appeal. It is paradoxical that the sexual motive has almost universally been ascribed to the Japanese, where the evidence suggests to the contrary, and only recently has it been acknowledged in the case of McColl, where the evidence has always been strong.

These then are the circumstances of the 'Black War' which brought the attention of the wider community towards the Aborigines and Arnhem Land. The police on the initial patrol had not been successful. On the second attempt with a larger patrol operating from a base on Groote Eylandt, Police Constable McColl had been killed. To the audience in Darwin, and to a lesser extent the south, it appeared that the police had lost control of the situation and the solution would lie in more drastic measures; a punitive expedition was discussed openly. It had only been a few years earlier in the Territory, in 1928, that the notorious Coniston massacre had taken place (Cribbin 1984), where Mounted Constable Murray reported an 'official' tally of 31 Aborigines killed (unofficial figures are estimated as much higher) as a reprisal for the killings of two Europeans (Powell 1982, 179-80).

Police Constable Heathcock from Roper Bar wrote to some of the surrounding settlers and asked them their feelings about possible threats from the Caledons. He received a variety of responses such as: 'The blacks are a peaceful and inoffensive lot' from Rogers of 'Roper Valley' station (Rogers 1934, CRS A1 34/1141) to a letter from another pastoralist, Gibbs, who wrote:

The Balamooma's [sic] have sent word now for years that they will come over and clean the Groote and Roper Whites and Blacks up and take their women folk. Just you mention the Balamooma's are coming and watch their eyes (Gibbs 1934, CRS A1 34/1141).

The missionary on Groote, Stanley Port, seemed to have succumbed to the hysteria and rumours of an attack. He sent a series of telegrams to CMS headquarters stating: 'Caledon Bay natives ... may visit us with hostile intentions any time ... Staff think advisable police protection' (Port 1933a, NTRS 868). Another was sent a week later which read: 'Police have reason to believe that Caledons possess firearms ... Staff and Police unanimous adequate police protection advisable' (Port 1933b, NTRS 868). This was a change in attitude as Port had telegraphed CMS headquarters only two weeks earlier stating that rumours of an attack were unfounded (*Melbourne Herald* 28 August 1933). This opinion was repeated by Port's father-in-law, ironically echoing the words of Fagan and Traynor, 'One white man with a gun could hold hundreds of Caledon blacks at bay' (*Melbourne Herald* 13 September 1933). The Northern Territory administration sent an armed party of three police and four Aboriginal police to join Constable Hall 'in the protection of the Groote Island [sic] Mission, where an attack by hostile blacks is feared' (*Melbourne Herald* 8 September 1933).



ABORIGINE: "What for him walk about all dr essed up with guns?"
MISSIONARY: "He has been sent by Mr. Perkins to protect me against you, Jacky"

Figure 3 Cartoon, *Daily Telegraph*, 16 September 1933

It is difficult to assess the likelihood of a punitive expedition being mounted in this case. Vic Hall, one of the Police Constables stationed on Groote at this time, dismissed the notion of a punitive expedition and put it down to journalistic excess: 'nothing sanguinary was contemplated by anybody, except maybe the journalist who suggested the possibility of a punitive expedition' (Hall 1962, 128).

But the idea of a reprisal seems to have come most emphatically from Darwin (*Sydney Morning Herald* 4 September 1933; *Argus* 7 & 12 September 1933). Newspaper accounts stated: 'the majority of residents here say that while the tribe remains unpunished, no lugger crews ... or shipwrecked fishermen will be safe' (*Melbourne Herald* 6 September 1933). Two days later the Northern Territory Administrator, Colonel Weddell, is mentioned as strongly urging 'that a punitive expedition should set out as soon as possible. It is essential ... to teach the Caledon Bay natives a lesson ... The menace has been conveyed to Darwin by friendly tribes' (*Melbourne Herald* 8 September 1933). The Minister for the Interior, Perkins, expressed his perturbation at the prospect of an expedition of reprisal but added that he had been advised from Darwin that 'an expedition would be necessary to uphold the prestige of the whites against the natives' (*Melbourne Sun* 2 September 1933). With the Conniston massacre still fresh in people's minds, the fear that the events in Arnhem Land could unleash more killings was a real one. Nonetheless everyone was taken by surprise at the response to the suggestion that Darwin police and residents take matters into their own hands. It was unequivocal.

CHAPTER FIVE

SOLUTIONS

*I don't mind blokes who drinks or smokes,
who fettles or works on derricks.
I can even stand, a German band,
but I draw the line at clerics.*

*We'll strike me pink, I'd sooner drink,
with a cove sent up for arson,
than a raging, screeching, preaching, teaching,
blithering, blathering parson.
(Traditional, Australian bush ballad c. nineteenth
century).*

The proposed punitive expedition into Arnhem Land in the 1930s to avenge the killings was universally condemned. The response was startling. Church and Labour organisations, as well as a number of associations formed to better the condition of Aborigines, wrote to newspapers and petitioned the Minister for the Interior deploring the possibility of a punitive expedition including: Labor Women's Organising Committee (*Argus* 4 September 1933), Association for the Protection of Native Races, Council of Churches (*Sydney Morning Herald* 5 September 1933), Victorian Aborigines Group (*Argus* 9 September 1933), United Missionary Council, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, Trades Hall Council (*Argus* 8 September 1933), Postal Workers Union, Womens International League for Peace and Freedom (*Argus* 7 September 1933), Lord Mayor Alderman Hagon and Federal Opposition Leader Scullin (*Argus* 6 September 1933). Langford Smith wrote to Perkins, the Minister for the Interior, asking to be of assistance since he was experienced in local conditions stating that, 'My heart is in Arnhem Land' (Langford Smith 1933, CRS A1 33/8459). Groups, individuals, clubs, societies, academics and southern Aborigines wrote, held meetings, signed petitions and organised protests against a proposed punitive expedition.

It was in the climate of fear of a punitive reprisal from Darwin, petitions pleading clemency from the south, and a feeling that the police could not really handle the situation, that the missionaries from the CMS stepped in with a new proposal.

A peaceful expedition led by missionaries familiar with the area around the Gulf was suggested to seek out the Yolngu involved with the killings, make contact with them and persuade them to give themselves up for trial. The CMS contacted the Reverend Burton, General Secretary of the Methodist Mission, asking that Theodor Webb be invited to join the party of missionaries (Burton 1933, CRS A452 53/106). Webb declined on the grounds that he felt that the party would be unsuccessful without the use of force, that the Yolngu would confuse the missionaries with police 'seeing objectives identical' (Webb nd c 1933, CRS A452 53/106) and that the expedition would be impossible and dangerous. Webb suggested that if an expedition took place at all, there should be a moratorium for at least twelve months before an expedition 'accompanied by a man, such as Mr FH Gray, who has worked in Caledon Bay and is well known to one or two of the tribes there' (*Melbourne Herald* 3 November 1933) prepare the way before the missionaries moved in. Webb, who was on furlough in Sydney, gave several interviews (*The Age* 4 October 1933; *Argus* 3 October 1933) outlining his strategies:

*The only effective way to calm the natives is to establish a permanent mission station staffed by men who understand the native psychology thoroughly ... If you establish a mission station at Caledon Bay the natives will gradually filter into it for the medical treatment ... Gradually they will come to value the advantages of a settled, peaceful life near the station and they, too, will become friendly to the white man (*Melbourne Herald* 26 October 1933).*

Webb strongly suggested the need for the establishment of a mission station at Caledon Bay 'on behalf of the Methodist Church' (*The Age* 8 March 1934). The Methodist mission placed this suggestion in official channels at the same time and sent copies of the resolutions of the North Australian Synod from 9 October to the Northern Territory Administrator, and to the Minister for the Interior, recommending the opening of a new mission station in the area (Webb 1933, CRS F1 49/456). Contrast the words therefore of the CMS missionary, the Reverend Alf Dyer, who immediately volunteered for the expedition when he was quoted in an interview some weeks later to the *Sydney Sun*:

When these savages do wrong the best way of dealing with them is to give them a good beating. They almost grow to love one afterwards, and respect a man who goes among them like a Mussolini ... I have a toy tin squeaker, which I propose to play to the

accompaniment of comic grins and gestures – what you would call 'acting the goat'. Once I get them laughing their hostility will begin to disappear (Sydney Sun 3 November 1933).

The contrast between the two missionary societies' approach to the threatened punitive expedition is almost ludicrously disparate. The men who ultimately took part in the missionary expedition were Warren, Dyer and a radio officer called Donald Fowler. Fowler, a relative new chum, volunteered because he said that he had seen a punitive expedition in the Solomon Islands when in the Navy and did not want this experience repeated (Fowler 1985, 7-8). But Warren and Dyer had both shared years of experience in Arnhem Land mission stations and, like Webb, had been the dynamic force in several fledgling settlements. Why then this difference of approach?

The structural or administrative differences between the two societies were minimal. The Methodists seemed to have exercised a slightly tighter rein on their field staff than did the Anglicans and their administering bodies seemed to have been more closely in touch, but missionaries from both societies felt the isolation they experienced in the field was not appreciated by their administering superiors in the south. The differences of approach between Webb and Warren and Dyer can be best explained by looking at the field experience of the individuals themselves.

Warren and Dyer were very much in the nineteenth century tradition of missionary experience. Dyer's work in the Northern Territory arose after a direct call from God (Harris 1990, 712) when he encountered Warren on leave in Albury in 1915 (Cole 1972b, 15). Warren and Dyer worked almost entirely in isolation with very little support, information or even monitoring from the Northern Territory Administration. When problems arose in those early days, either a solution was found or they had to make do. They did not look for outside support and, particularly in Dyer's case, where external commentary or criticism occurred they would naively tell their version without any apparent consciousness of how it might appear to an outsider.

Contrast then the experience of a man like Webb. Webb arrived at Milingimbi at the end of the twenties and while his field experiences were comparable with Warren's and Dyer's, his attitude to the Yolngu was radically different. He did not write about a 'doomed race' as the early CMS missionaries did, but detailed notes of a dynamic culture and society. He put forward the notion of Aboriginal resistance to non-Aboriginal incursions: 'They killed the Japanese in the defence of their

own country, just as we would use every endeavour to repel invaders' (*Melbourne Herald* 23 October 1933). After several years field experience Webb realised that the destruction of Yolngu spiritual and cultural belief was counterproductive to the transmission of the Christian message. His statements to the press were guarded. Webb employed the typical caution of the Methodists by counselling a twelve month wait and warning of the danger involved in an expedition. The isolation and twenty years' field experience which gave Warren and Dyer the qualifications for the missionary expedition were also the reason they undertook it. They were out of touch with the times. Webb was not.

The CMS was in need of some good publicity to restore credibility to their work after the recent scandal at Roper River. The society was finding it difficult even to maintain their existing stations let alone achieve their hopes of further expansion. Both the CMS and the MMS anticipated opening a new mission in the Caledon Bay area but the issue of whether east Arnhem Land was big enough to support two missionary societies was already under question.

When Arnhem Land had been divided earlier this century into respective 'spheres of activity' by a meeting of Protestant Churches, the Caledon Bay area fell within the CMS zone. But after the Government Board of Enquiry into the conduct of Roper River mission it seemed unlikely that any new mission station at Caledon Bay would be entrusted to the CMS. When Webb called for the establishment of a mission station he implied it should be Methodist. Not surprising then, one of the first actions taken by Warren on his first trip with the CMS Peace Expedition was: 'discussed with blacks proposal to form mission station at or near Caledon Bay' (Warren 1933-34, ML MSS.872 8-215B). By March 1934, Warren wrote: 'This afternoon Wongoe gave willingly a piece of land for the erection of Church & house for future missionary work' (Warren 1933-34, ML MSS.872 8-215B). Having negotiated with the owners of the land, Warren, Dyer and Fowler built:

A little one roomed church with its bark walls and roof contained all the necessary furniture, all constructed from rough timber; from shells gathered from the beach (Fowler 1985, 130).

Although never to be used in a settlement, the ambassadors had created their embassy at Caledon Bay, the church of St David.

In hindsight it is easy to see that the missionary expedition to Arnhem Land could not possibly have achieved the results that the CMS

desired. People who were hostile to the Aborigines after the Caledon Bay and Woodah Island killings, were hostile to the missionary expedition for forestalling the possibility of a punitive expedition. The Police felt that their role was being usurped by amateurs who gained publicity at their expense, and they were later to retaliate. Finally, people who were sympathetic to the Aboriginal viewpoint, saw no justice in transporting the accused Aborigines into an alien society and culture to be tried under hostile conditions in a foreign language. As always, the church had its own supporters, but in terms of a publicity exercise, the expedition was doomed to failure from the beginning.

The overtly stated aims of the 'Missionary Expedition to the Aborigines in Arnhem Land' (later called the 'Peace Expedition') expressed in a resolution passed by the Melbourne Diocesan Synod on 6 October 1933, were fairly modest:

That this Synod hears with thankfulness of the Government's decision to permit a joint embassy of missionaries approaching the aborigines of Arnhem Land with a view to establishing a better mutual understanding, respect and goodwill between the black and white races, and calls upon this Church to give this movement their approval and to support it with continued prayer (Church Missionary Gleaner 1933).

But the police were immediately hostile to the idea of missionary involvement. Morey, stationed on Groote Eylandt, wrote in protest to the Administrator:

It is expected by the Missionaries that by the lavish gifts of tobacco, flour, tea, sugar, etc., that they will win the confidence of the natives. The Missionaries ... would not leave the sanctuary of their boat but invite the natives out to them with promise of gifts... To our minds the whole scheme is wrong ... It is really bribery (Morey 1933b, CRS A452 53/106).

In both the missionary and police accounts at this stage it is apparent that there was no expectation of arrest of the alleged offenders.

The Peace Expedition arrived at Caledon Bay on the mission ship *Holly* on 6 December 1933. After the experiences of the police and the tremendous publicity surrounding the killings, it must have been something of a surprise to find Fred Gray and Andy Wright camping there collecting trepang. Warren was amazed that: They had no fear of

any trouble with the Caledon Bay people' (Warren 1933-34, ML MSS.872 8-215B). Further, Gray and Wright, under the initial mistaken impression that Warren was from the police, had persuaded the four Yolngu who were implicated in the killing of the Japanese to give themselves up (Fowler 1985, 40). At the same time, the missionaries learnt that it was not the Caledons who were responsible for the death of McColl, as had been previously thought (Fowler 1985, 41) and that Fagan and Traynor were missing, last seen by Gray the February before (Warren 1933-34, ML MSS.872 8-215B).

The Peace Expedition made a number of trips between Groote Eylandt, Burketown, Roper River and the islands and bays in the Gulf and found cooperation seemingly everywhere. On 24 January 1934 Warren wrote:

reached Tarkiera's camp 9 am ... All men & boys came aboard - They seem to have lost their fear now & freely & openly discussed with us the killing of Traynor & Fagan & Constable McColl - They frankly admitted their share & told us who did the actual killing - Tarkiera himself & Merara confessing to the deed before their fellows & the whole expedition party (Warren 1933-34, ML MSS.872 8-215B).

The Peace Expedition had thus more than satisfied its original aims. It had made peaceful contact with the Yolngu, it had discussed the murders and had obtained confessions from the offenders. Perhaps then, if they had done no more, the exercise would have been hailed as a great success. But this was not to be.

A radio message was received from Darwin stating that Dyer had the Northern Territory Administration's permission to bring in the Yolngu to stand trial on his way home. Fowler wrote:

we could read between the lines and see that the Government particularly wanted the killer of Constable McColl to stand trial. It was obvious that if Tarkiera did not go voluntarily in to Darwin a strong police party would be sent, after we had returned South and who knows but what they may not have the same tragic resultant loss of life (Fowler 1985, 129).

So the Peace Expedition went one stage further than anticipated. The Oituli would be skippered by Gray, who had recently lost his own boat at Trial Bay, and accompanied by Dyer 'to take the men into Darwin if they would go voluntarily' to stand trial. In March 1934 the whole



5 Fowler and Tuckiar, Peace Expedition, 1934, FGPP

6 Gray and Narriljan, Darwin Harbour, 1934, AIATSIS, N3636-2, EH Wilson collection.



7 *'The Peace Expedition reaches Darwin harbour', ALATSIS, N3636-6, EH Wilson collection*



8 *Fred Gray and Merara in Darwin, ALATSIS, N3639-10, EH Wilson collection*

party aboard the *Oituli* left Groote Eylandt for Darwin. It is tempting to ascribe to Tuckiar some premonition of what would happen. The day Tuckiar and Merara were due to leave for Darwin via Caledon Bay, they slipped overboard and went back to their families for one last visit. The *Oituli* and crew sailed to the north of Groote Eylandt where they made contact with Tuckiar who said that he 'was quite willing to come with us now that he had seen his wives and piccaninny' (*Northern Standard* 20 April 1934). When the Caledons surrendered themselves to Gray and Dyer to be taken into Darwin: 'Up anchor, up sail, and away, a great wailing goes up from the shore which is lined with women and children' (*Northern Standard* 20 April 1934). But the Caledons did come home again; Tuckiar never returned alive.

Ironically, the Peace Expedition had been a sweeping success in terms of bringing the offenders into Darwin for trial. But both the police and public were displeased at the outcome. The reality of the situation became clear to Dyer when the boat arrived in Darwin,

an insuperable barrier of language, knowledge, custom and background between the parties, and yet, as the law then stood, the whole ceremonial of British legal procedure, and legal phraseology, had to be followed exactly, even though totally incomprehensible to the accused (Dyer nd, 67).

When the offenders were brought into Darwin for trial it became clear that they had no idea what was going on or what was going to happen to them. Fred Gray noted that the party was confused disembarking from the *Oituli* because none of the Yolngu had seen steps before and could not work out how to get onto the wharf (Gray 1988, 6 May interview):

Once in confinement all the arrested natives evidenced the utmost terror, exhibiting fear and shaking the bars of their cells like newly-caged animals ... Last night, realising they were prisoners, the arrested natives walked up and down the cell verandah shaking the bars and howling like dingoes ... Their terror was renewed when the police entered their cells to handcuff them. The three younger men were so terrified at the appearance of the handcuffs that they attacked the police in the cells with the gaol utensils (The Age 12 April 1934).

Fred Gray who visited the prisoners noted that they looked as if they had been 'bashed up' and 'knocked about' by the police (Gray 1988, 6 May interview). Justice Martin Kriewaldt, who was Judge Wells's successor,

has noted the defence, which as far as he could ascertain, had never been used in the Northern Territory that, 'If the accused cannot understand the nature of the proceedings of a trial he cannot be tried, and if he cannot be tried, he cannot be punished' (Kriewaldt 1960, 21). He further commented that 'in the Northern Territory the trial of an aborigine [sic] in most cases proceeds, and so far as I could gather, has always proceeded, as if the accused were not present' (Kriewaldt 1960, 23). Clearly none of the accused in this case had any idea of what was happening and technically the trial should not have proceeded.

The CMS responded quickly to the criticism with an official statement that the members of the Peace Expedition had been 'surprised to find a voluntary readiness on the part of some natives ... to surrender themselves' and that it was 'faced with the responsibility of handling a delicate situation which was entirely not of its making or seeking' (*The Age* 14 April 1934). The embarrassing success of the missionary expedition was deplored not only by the public but criticism was also voiced by other Christian denominations. The editorial from the *Presbyterian Messenger* stated: 'we are afraid the natives will feel they have been betrayed and will no longer trust the missionaries. We believe it is a grave blunder to call in the missionaries to become agents of the police' (*Northern Standard* 20 April 1934). Writer and newspaper editor Jessie Litchfield wrote to the *Brisbane Telegraph* from Darwin stating that the:

peace patrol of the Revs Dyer and Warren was a mistake; experienced missionaries such as Rev T. T. Webb ... condemned it utterly; while it was impossible to find anyone in the Territory who had one good word to say in its favour (Northern Standard 8 June 1934).

Public meetings were held in Darwin and Sydney where people protested at the missionary involvement in the expedition. The Federal Member for the Northern Territory, Harold Nelson, is quoted as saying:

Now we come to the question of the Hollywood missionaries. They may appear all right on the screen but we have no time for them in the North ... [the Aborigines] were betrayed by the greatest Judasses that ever existed in this country ... when you try to capitalise Christianity it is low down (Nelson 1934, CRS A1 34/6710).

Nelson exhorted the Darwin crowd as to the perfidy and cowardice of the missionaries to loud applause from the audience. Dyer, who was present, spoke briefly of his work as a missionary but the general

mood of the crowd was against him. In Sydney a public meeting declared: 'A grave indiscretion has been committed by the arrest of the Caledon Bay natives. Missionaries should not be policemen' (*Sydney Morning Herald* 13 August 1934). Warren replied that he had acted 'in good faith'.

Scientist and anthropologist, Donald Thomson, who had been writing to the Federal Government (supported by the Chancellor of Melbourne University Sir John MacFarland and others) for permission to intervene on behalf of the Caledons but who was pre-empted by the Peace Expedition wrote: 'The Peace Expedition ultimately betrayed them [the Yolngu] by luring some of the Aborigines to Darwin ostensibly for reconciliatory talks, but in fact to be arrested' (Thomson 1983, 21). Both Thomson (Thomson 1983, 7) and Gray (Min for Int 1935, CRS F1 36/386) wrote to the Federal Government asking for the release of the Caledon Bay prisoners.

The trial of Tuckiar had caused resentment of the missionaries from both sides. During the trial, it was suggested that the story of McColl's sexual involvement with Japarri was a story fabricated by the missionaries (Dyer ndb NTRS 693). Dyer's comments to the court before sentence was passed also seemed inexplicable and strangely at odds with his role as a Minister of the Anglican Church. He said:

If he was a dictator he would drive all the abos. into Liberty Square and give them all a good flogging. Merara, who had been acquitted was as big a scoundrel as any of them, and he would be amongst those flogged. Then he would let them see a bayonet charge and have the soldiers up to show them a volley and then tell them if there was any more killing they would all be shot down on the beach. He was not speaking as a missionary or protector but as dictator. He knew his mission friends would not agree with his utterances (Northern Standard 7 August 1934).

These comments by Dyer proved to be even more than Judge Wells could swallow and he commented that: 'The people in the north would understand Mr. Dyer's attitude but he did not know about the people down south' (*Northern Standard* 7 August 1934).

Tuckiar's fate was to cause further anger. Tuckiar's conviction was quashed when an appeal was made to the High Court, and he was then free to return to his country, people and family. But Tuckiar never returned. Vic Hall, a police colleague of McColl's, in his book *Dreamtime Justice* detailed a story of revenge by Aboriginal police

tracker Paddy (Big Pat) who, outraged by the killing of McColl, pursued him across Arnhem Land and finally killed him. But it would appear that Tuckiar never left Darwin. After his successful appeal, Dyer had arranged to take Tuckiar to the pictures. Dyer recalled that he waited but Tuckiar 'never came' (Dyer ndc, 4, NTRS 693) The rumour circulated in Darwin that members of the police force loyal to McColl were determined to even the score and murdered Tuckiar and disposed of the body in the harbour (Gray 1984, 4 October interview). Ted Egan states that he has been told by 'a reliable source' the name of the police officer who was responsible for Tuckiar's death but at present Egan is not revealing specific details (Egan 1989). Tuckiar's fate may never be made public, but despite his successful appeal and despite the 'good faith' of the missionaries, when he boarded the *Oituli* to come into Darwin, it was the last he was to see of his country and family.

Rather mysteriously, the *Adelaide Express and Journal* published a story without by-line entitled 'Tuckiar's odyssey – How acquitted native braved terror of sea, hostile natives and jungle on his adventurous 700 mile flight home from Darwin' (*Express and Journal* 22 December 1934) containing a fictitious account of Tuckiar's return home. There is an unsigned note attached to this clipping in Fred Gray's private papers, in the handwriting of the late Fred Rose, an anthropologist familiar with the Arnhem Landers, saying:

I think one day, when the real truth comes out it will be rather interesting reading.

I wonder if it would be possible to find out who wrote this article. It is unsigned. Probably a guilty party.

But the truth has not yet come out and the people directly involved have since died, their secret with them.

The dramatically increased official presence in Arnhem Land as a result of the various investigations into the Caledon Bay and Woodah Island killings had an unforeseen repercussion for the CMS at Emerald River. The police who had been stationed on Groote Eylandt during the time of the Peace Expedition had time to talk with the members of the settlement. Much dissatisfaction had been expressed to the police and they responded by collecting statements and writing to Chief Protector Dr Cook. Vic Hall stated:

Accusations against the Police and Aboriginal Dept. involving charges of ill-treatment, brutality, and every black offence against humanity, decency, and law, even down to accusations of

wholesale murder, are continually brought by the Missionaries. Yet we find, no publicity is given to cases ... which constitute bluntly, a clear condition of slavery, on the following grounds.

(a) Continuous service, seven days a week without pay.

(b) Detention against the will.

(c) Complete deprivation of liberty under lock and key (Hall 1933, CRS A659 43/1/70).

Not only the police but also the pastoralists expressed hostility about the role of missions to Aborigines. 'Territorian' wrote to the *Northern Standard* complaining that:

It is a disgraceful state of affairs that a large area of country such as Arnheim [sic] Land should be locked up to white men while missionaries are allowed unrestricted access to exploit its potential wealth with sweated labour (Northern Standard 15 December 1933).

The Administrator noted of Roper that: 'the Mission probably sells [a] portion of its cattle on the open market, which may give an unfair advantage over other lessees whose lease conditions are not so favourable' (Abbott 1939, CRS F1 40/394).

None of the missionary stations in Arnhem Land at this time showed profits. Rather they were white elephants which consumed money and energy. The general mood of the people was, however, that the missionaries were exploiting both goods and resources, with the unfair advantages of access to cheap land and use of an unpaid labour force. An influential letter published by EJ Holloway MHR in the *Herald* and reprinted in the *Northern Standard* summed up the feelings of the public towards missionary work in Arnhem Land with the Aborigines:

Territorians say that the natives are spoiled by attending the mission stations – they become cunning and distrustful and play one authority off against another.

People who wish to employ a native boy or a young lubra invariably say that they would not have one from the missions, but would prefer one straight from the native camp ...

They learn to bargain for tobacco, etc., and they become dirty, diseased and lazy. Sore eyes and venereal disease constitute [sic] a danger to all (Melbourne Herald 12 June 1934; Northern Standard 17, 24 July 1934).

In all respects then, it can be seen that the 1930s were times of great difficulty for the missions generally but particularly the CMS. Their high public profile coupled with severe criticism of their work resulted in a general loss of confidence in their ability to work in Arnhem Land. An article in the *Bulletin* summed up the general feeling:

It looks as if interest in Caledon Bay may now sleep until Buck-Eye and his warriors scupper a few more Japanese ... Everybody has had a fair innings - the missionaries their limelight and a Government subsidy, the abos a free trip and some new experiences, the flapper press its sensations and the tax-payers, their usual privilege of paying for the whole muddle. So everybody should be satisfied (Bulletin 16 May 1934; Northern Standard 8 June 1934).

The CMS did however, gain one small concession as a result of their work with the Peace Expedition. On their trip around the Gulf to the neighbouring islands and settlements, Warren called in at Roper River. Roper River had suffered a decline in the Yolngu population and had borne the brunt of the public scandal following the Commission of Enquiry and, as already mentioned, strong pressure was being exerted by the Northern Territory Administration, largely by Dr Cook, to close the station down.

In 1913 Warren's vision and dynamism had lifted morale at Roper and prompted the expansion to Groote Eylandt. The Peace Expedition gave him a chance, his last in the Territory (as he died soon afterwards in a plane crash), to do it again. He sent a telegram to the General Secretary saying:

Move heaven and earth to save Roper station from closing over 100 abos here now more than 50 children being taught stop daily medical attention available niggardly subsidy immaterial will be everlasting shame and disgrace to let go what we have fought for and held for 25 years (Warren 1934, ML.MSS 872).

Further he collected a petition of some 200 names of Yolngu adults and children from the Roper River mission protesting at its closure and asking that it might be allowed to continue (Petition 1934, CRS A452 53/106). Largely as a result of Warren's support, the missionaries remained without Government subsidy or tenure of their site until a decision was finally made by the Northern Territory Administrator in 1939: 'I do not see any reason why the Church

Missionary Society should not receive a proper lease and possibly the extra area desired by them to be included' (Abbott 1939, CRS F1 40/394).

But at this time, immediately after the Peace Expedition, it was no surprise that the Northern Territory Administration granted permission to the MMS to open a new station in the Gulf area rather than the CMS (Carrodus 1934a, CRS F1 49/459). This decision had not taken place without some haggling by the two societies beforehand. Long, General Secretary of the CMS, argued that:

whatever agreement there may have been as to spheres of influence, the proclamation of the Arnhem Land Reserve two years ago has created a new situation ... the Board of Enquiry ... recommends that the Roper Station be closed on medical grounds and that a fresh grant of land within the Reserve be made to the Society in lieu of the present site (Long 1933, CRS F1 49/459).

Here Long seemed to be acknowledging a right of the Methodist society to establish a station at Caledon Bay under the old 'spheres of influence' structure. This was reiterated by Webb in his argument for claim to Caledon Bay:

the responsibility of the Methodist Missionary Society extends right along the North coast and down to the 13th degree of latitude South so that Caledon Bay itself falls within that Society's sphere of operation whereas Blue Mud Bay and below lies within the area recognized as the responsibility of the Church Missionary Society (Webb 1933, CRS F1 49/459).

This is still something of a puzzle, as it was to the Department of the Interior at the time. Where did Webb get the 13th latitude as a limit to spheres of influence from? The Department of the Interior found 'No trace' apart from the plan drawn up by the Council of Churches in 1912 which put the whole western Gulf area in the hands of the Anglicans (Brown 1934, CRS F1 49/459). This is backed up further by a copy of the same map in the records of the Methodist Church in the Mitchell Library (ML.Meth.Ch.OM 238, items 4 & 5). Since Long himself had acknowledged the waiving of the 'spheres of influence' and since the Minister for Home and Territories in 1920 had deemed that mission stations of different denominations had to be 'at least 100 miles apart' (ML.Meth.Ch.OM 238, items 4&5) the new mission station in the Gulf area went to the Methodist society. There is a suggestion in the notes from the Methodist Church that the CMS may have made

one last try to work in this Gulf area. There is a cryptic comment in the notes of the Methodist archives: 'Oenpelli-Yirrkala Exchange!! Unanimous in condemning this proposal' (Anon 1936, NTRS 45).

The 1930s were a period in which 'policies' and 'strategies' for dealing with the 'Aboriginal problem' were seriously discussed. A Conference of Commonwealth and State Authorities was convened in 1937 and for the first time issues such as the use of neck chains for Aboriginal prisoners and the possibility of establishing 'native courts' were discussed (Rowley 1980, 329; Grenfell Price 1950, 142). The Churches of all denominations, however, continued to exert a powerful influence suppressing criticism of their missionary activities towards Aborigines. Although a resolution was passed by the Conference urging greater regulation of Aboriginal missions, because of a 'good deal of unfavourable criticism' voiced by delegates, the debate was not recorded and no record of discussion kept (CRS A1 37/15996). Despite the process of writing history by omission, by the end of the decade a loss of confidence in the Northern Territory missions is easily detected. When the appropriately named 'Dr Crookston' made allegations of missionary brutality, of chaining up and flogging women, Native Affairs branch became anxious: 'Is it possible do you think that Crookston has got hold of a garbled version of the conditions which were supposed to exist on the Roper River Mission prior to the establishment of a Commission ...' asked VJ White for the Director of Native Affairs (White 1939, F1 40/478).

The publicity surrounding the Caledon Bay and Woodah Island killings had a great influence on the subsequent actions and decisions of both the missionaries and the Territory Administration and Federal Government. The white populations of southern Australia, who a generation earlier had relaxed into complacency about the grievances and demands of local Aboriginal people, were forced into a debate which raised issues central to any examination of the rights of indigenous peoples. Aborigines were seen to be justified in defending their land and their laws (particularly in Arnhem Land which was so far away). The killings at Caledon Bay and Woodah Island, the 'Black War', were the catalysts for the recognition of Aboriginal rights to social justice. Increasingly the Government intervened in the running of the missions and it was no longer thought appropriate that Arnhem Land be an uncontrolled environment. For the missionaries it brought a reminder that the outside world was no longer content to let them have sole control in decisions affecting the Aborigines.

CHAPTER SIX

AFTERMATH

to transform people from a nomadic tribal state to take their place in a civilized community (McEwen 1939, CRS A452 52/541)

Three more settlements were established in Arnhem Land before the war, but only two of them were for Aborigines and only one was a missionary settlement. The first of these was the Methodist station in eastern Arnhem Land settlement to service Caledon Bay and the Gulf area.

A benefactor, Mr FJ Cato, offered the Methodist Mission Board £1000 to open a new station among the Caledon Bay people (Burton 1934, CRS F1 49/459). Originally, the plan was to establish the station in the Caledon Bay area where the CMS had erected St David's church. For some eighteen months the Methodist missionaries made exploratory trips around the area to determine the best site; five journeys in all (Anon 1935, NTRS 45). Wilbur Chaseling, the founder of the new station, said:

It is very difficult to find a suitable area for a station in North East Arnhem Land or anywhere in Arnhem Land. It is necessary to have good water, arable land, building sites fairly high and an anchorage for the boat which was the only means of transport in those days. I don't know of any site in Arnhem Land possessing all these requirements but Yirrkala had some of them at any rate (Chaseling 1975, 2, NTRS 226 TS 27).

Yirrkala, on the Gove Peninsula, officially opened in November 1935 with the first building completed and 130 Yolngu camped by. Chaseling, in line with Methodist policy inspired by Webb, tried not to overtly intervene with the 'traditional' beliefs of the Yolngu:

I felt that there are many fine customs and beliefs amongst these people and I endeavoured in every possible way to induce them to maintain these beliefs and customs except such things as killing ... several tonnes of artefacts and sacred objects were sent to the museums ... and this enabled me to pay the Aborigines and further develop their independence and respect for these sacred sites (Chaseling 1975, 3, 5, NTRS 226 TS 27).

It is dubious whether the sale of sacred objects and artefacts to museums helped the Yolngu develop respect for their 'sacred sites', but Chaseling was clearly looking to develop a commercial independence. At Yirrkala particularly there was support from Yolngu for the art and craft programs fostered by the missionaries. Ironically, probably its most famous expression came some thirty years later with the bark petition painted by clan leaders of the area and presented to Prime Minister Menzies to protest about lack of consultation when mining began in this area.

Despite the encouraged release of psychological tension through art, Yirrkala, particularly in the early stages, faced the gamut of problems experienced by the other communities: isolation of the missionary staff, staff shortages, intergroup fighting. Chaseling felt that conflict could be reduced by using the mission station as a base, small familial groups could live in their own country while still receiving the medical and educational benefits of settlement. This suggestion was not accepted, 'I was ruled out of order' (Chaseling 1975, 7, NTRS 226 TS 27).

A report from 1938 stated: 'Year characterised by tribal killings and blood feuds' (Anon 1938, NTRS 45). Intergroup differences were a very real problem at all settlements but particularly so at Yirrkala because the geographical isolation of the community meant that the mission serviced a large number of disparate groups from east Arnhem Land. Wongu and the other Caledons came up to live at the mission, as did groups from the English Company's Islands and Arnhem Bay. Tensions came to a head in 1937 when some youths from Caledon Bay were speared. Four people were speared in retaliation near Melville Bay and Arnhem Bay by the Caledons before the matter settled down (Anon 1938, NTRS 45). Since Chaseling was away on furlough at the time and the Yolngu did not appear to have sufficient confidence in his replacement, Yirrkala was temporarily deserted as everyone feared reprisals for the killings. Despite these problems however, Yirrkala was firmly established. After Chaseling's return the District Chairman, Len Kentish, noted a 'growth in Christian character ... which cannot be stated in statistical returns' (Anon 1940, NTRS 45).

The events following the 'Black War' continued to influence development in north-east Arnhem Land. Donald Thomson arrived at Yirrkala during his period of fieldwork in the Northern Territory. He came with the dual purpose of returning the Caledons who had been involved in the killing of the Japanese to their own country, and to



9 'Wongo's camp at Yirrkala', FGPP



*10 'Gray meeting Wongo after taking the Caledons into town
for the trial', FGPP*

mount a series of fact finding expeditions in Arnhem Land. His brief marked the determination of the Government to impose secular law in Arnhem Land:

- *To make contact with and establish ... friendly relations with the Aborigines.*
- *To encourage the natives, as far as possible, to realise the gravity of the major offences of murder, robbery and the like, both in respect of fellow natives as well as white men.*
- *To report cases ... of serious illness, such as leprosy, tuberculosis, cancer etc.*
- *To study and report upon the language, ceremonies, customs, moral codes, etc., of the various tribes, such report to be forwarded to the Minister for the Interior (Thomson 1983, 25, 26).*

As a result of his work in the Arnhem Land area, Donald Thomson made a series of recommendations:

It is no exaggeration to say that the great majority of the serious trouble of the people of Arnhem Land in recent years have [sic] been due directly or indirectly to the casual interference of intruders in the reserve ... Rigid segregation in the Arnhem Land Reserve and protection from all outside contact with its destructive and disintegrating results, alone would preserve this population as a stable, self-respecting [sic], self-supporting, primitive community (Thomson 1939, FGPP, 11, 17).

Thomson had a willing ear in Cook who shared his views completely: 'It would be better to leave the natives in the Caledon Bay district to their own devices than to establish missions therein' (Carroodus 1934b, CRS F1 49/459). Thomson's obvious reference to the 'casual interference of intruders' appears to be an allusion to Fred Gray who was still collecting trepang in the area.

Initially relations between Thomson and Gray were cordial (Gray nd [1935] 10 July Diary, FGPP). But by 1936 there was outright hostility. Gray recorded the following at Yirrkala mission:

When coming back from Mission last night Narachin tells me that Dr Thomson is very wild with me ... owing to Wulawery having reported to me that the Dr had threatened him with a rifle. Its [sic] nothing to me what the Dr does as he is from south with

Government authority ... tongues wag easily in these places for we do not often see other people, but it makes things very uncomfortable (Gray 1936 11 July Diary, FGPP).

From this period onward Thomson was critical of Gray's presence in Arnhem Land and worked together with Cook to remove him from the area. He wrote in his preliminary report:

the presence of Mr. Grey [sic] on the Reserve is not in the best interests of the natives. He adds that Mr. Grey has assumed ... an unwarranted authority over the natives camps ... and that friction has taken place.

Dr Thomson fears that a serious situation may arise at any time (Carrodus 1936, CRS F1 36/386).

Despite opposition, however, circumstances combined to legitimise and indeed consolidate Gray's presence in Arnhem Land. Qantas Empire Airways Ltd required a refuelling depot on Groote Eylandt for its regular flying boat service between Sydney and London and in 1938, the Groote Eylandt Air Base was established with the financial assistance of the British Government. The airbase was administered by the Department of Civil Aviation and as well as the base staff, there was also a Shell depot with its own separate staff.

An unofficial agreement existed between Gray and the CMS mission on Groote who had the lease on the area. Both Warren from the CMS and Chaseling from the Methodists had invited Gray to join them, but he preferred to work in a secular capacity. Gray initially wanted someone from the CMS to oversee the interaction between the men from the Flying Boat Base and the local people. He wrote to Cook: 'There is definite contact between the aboriginals [sic] and the men from the Base and the position ... in my opinion is unsatisfactory' (Gray 1938, FGPP). Gray, in this initial period in 1938 believed he was setting up the station for eventual administration by the CMS. Phil Taylor from the CMS told Gray that they would be unable to staff it for two years. Gray considered this situation unsatisfactory and applied to the Northern Territory administration for permission to take up residence. Cook wrote:

Deep consideration has been given to your application to remain upon the Groote Eylandt Aboriginal Reserve.

I regret to inform you, however, that it is not possible to extend your permit as I am satisfied that the interests of all parties would be best served by your vacating the camp site at Port Langdon (Cook 1938, FGPP).

Both the CMS and the Flying Boat Base staff, however, wanted Gray to oversee relations between the Groote Eylandters and staff. The CMS although lacking the staff to undertake the work themselves, were anxious as to the welfare of the Groote Eylandters if unsupervised interaction between the Flying Boat Base staff and the local people took place. The Base staff wanted Gray because it was much easier to negotiate with the Groote Eylandters through an intermediary. The Control Officer of the Base wrote to the Administrator in Darwin:

Since the Civil Aviation Department have taken over the above Base a considerable amount of petty pilfering and stealing has taken place ... Mr. F. Gray has been of the greatest assistance to me in this matter, not only having recovered a certain amount of stolen property for the Government but also has used his considerable influence in checking this annoyance and misdemeanours of the local aboriginals.

I may say I have never had to call in vain for assistance in other matters (Lowther 1939, FGPP).

Although in this period official permission for Fred Gray to remain on Groote was withheld, Carrodus, the Head of the Department of the Interior wrote:

I received your letter ... and note your replies to statements made by Dr Donald Thomson.

I do not think you need to worry a great deal about the matter. I feel that you may rest assured that if the Administration of the Northern Territory considered it undesirable that you should operate on the coast of Arnhem Land [action] would have been taken by them long ago.

Favourable reports have been received by me regarding the work you are doing (Carrodus 1940, FGPP).

Umbakumba settlement had begun. Gray like many others before him had a dream of a sedentary community, reaching self-sufficiency by means of agriculture rather than hunting and gathering. This was

similar to the missionary ideals but, unlike the missions, Gray operated Umbakumba entirely without subsidy apart from the use of the land.

Marxist anthropologist Fred Rose, like Thomson, was later critical of Gray's role in developing Umbakumba settlement despite his friendship with Gray (Rose was best man at Gray's wedding in 1946). Rose wrote: 'Fred Gray was no philanthropist and to implement his schemes he exploited the Aborigines. They had no understanding of money and when employed to fish for pearl-shell they were paid in kind; food, tobacco and perhaps a piece of cloth' (Rose 1968, 135). In spite of such criticism, Umbakumba was developed along the lines of the other mission settlements in east Arnhem Land. Dormitories were built to house children and unmarried adolescents and a kitchen provided a controlled and regular food supply for the local Groote Eylandters as well as selling bread to the base staff at Port Langdon.

So by the late 1930s, three new settlements had been established in east Arnhem Land: Yirrkala, the Flying Boat Base at Port Langdon and Umbakumba. But what of the existing stations?

On Groote Eylandt, the CMS missionaries at Emerald River refocussed efforts towards the local people and those who had come in from neighbouring islands (Taylor 1936, CRS A659 43/1/70). Cook remained obdurate in his views: 'I cannot regard the work done by Groote Island [sic] as of any value' (Carrodus 1937, CRS F1 38/534) although no action was taken to close the mission.

The enquiry into the conduct of Langford Smith, the controversy over treatment and conditions at Emerald River raised as a consequence of the Caledon Bay and Woodah Island killings and the aftermath of the Peace Expedition ensured that the CMS lost the potential site at Caledon Bay to the MMS. The legacy of Arnhem Land divided denominationally between the CMS and the MMS is perhaps still apparent in political debate today (Dewar 1990, 30-1). Despite the lobbying power of the Churches to suppress unfavourable comment, missions of both denominations faced criticism from the Federal Government and Territory Administration during this period.

Roper River, operating in defiance of the Northern Territory Administration, was reported by Cook as 'much improved' in 1937 (Carrodus 1937, CRS F1 38/534). In 1939, LJ Harris, Chaplain of the mission, applied for the land to be proclaimed Aboriginal reserve including the vacant crown land bordering the mission up to the

Arnhem Land border (Harris 1939, CRS F1 40/394). This was gazetted in 1940 and the southern border of Arnhem Land has remained fixed at this location to the present (*Commonwealth Gazette*, no 210, 10 October 1940). Roper River mission had twice faced the threat of closure but had remained in operation in both cases as a result of Warren's lobbying. Floods in 1940 washed away the entire site and the mission was relocated to its present site at Ngukurr.

Although the publicity surrounding the Caledon Bay massacre had highlighted the Japanese presence in Arnhem Land, one of the areas the MMS missionaries found increasingly difficult to control was the interaction between mission Aborigines and the crews of the Japanese pearling boats which were so numerous in the area (Moy 1949, 2, CRS F1 49/456; Sweeney 1938, CRS F1 49/456). Despite this outside intrusion, the 1930s were a decade of consolidation and growth for the Methodist society in east Arnhem Land. The lesson they learnt from the publicity of the trial in 1927 was to maintain a low profile in the media. Webb correctly judged the response from Government and public when he refused to become involved in the Peace Expedition and won for the society permission to establish a new station at Yirrkala.

The process of land alienation underlies the history of Aboriginal-European contact in nineteenth century Australia. As European settlement spread throughout the continent, the preoccupation of identifying technological advancement as synonymous with progress allowed no reflection on the possibility that Aborigines had a prior right to the land. Arnhem Land is significant because, in a sense, it became a twentieth century allegory for Aboriginal-European interaction of the nineteenth century.

Although the Yolngu had had experience in both trade and commerce through the seasonal visits of the Macassans, permanent settlement by outsiders did not take place in any enduring way until the arrival of the missionaries. The physical and geographical unsuitability of the region for non-Aboriginal economic development meant that the Yolngu enjoyed a comparative isolation in comparison to the widespread European settlement of Aboriginal land elsewhere in Australia.

The missionary societies in Arnhem Land began their work in an effort to ease the passing of a dying race by the process of a transmission of Christian beliefs. Following the model of European society, both the CMS and the MMS attempted to settle the Yolngu in economically self-

sustaining village units. The missionaries, with little grasp of language or culture and no understanding of Yolngu spiritual relationship to the land, deliberately set about attempting to change the traditional hunter-gatherer economy to one of sedentary peasant agriculture. Although by the end of the 1930s there is evidence that some of the missionaries were beginning to gain some insight into Yolngu culture, initially their ignorance was staggering. The missionaries had no notion of traditional land tenure or Aboriginal spirituality; they did not understand the relationship between the different groups that they had dealings with and were in an easy position to be manipulated by anyone who told them what they expected to hear. In the early stages at least, the mission settlements were catalysts for relentless intergroup feuding which often resulted in death. Ironically the missionaries saw the chaos they had to a large extent created as a justification for their presence.

In the period before the Second World War the missionary societies were largely independent from outside audit. As a consequence their development was sometimes tangential from official Government policy. The events at Caledon Bay and Woodah Island focussed attention on this region and the role of the missionary societies came under increasing scrutiny.

At the same time, the publicity surrounding the events in Arnhem Land did much to consolidate the recognition of Aboriginal rights. Anthropologist AP Elkin considered the 1930s, and particularly the trial and Appeal of Tuckiar, marked a 'turning point' in Australian race relations (Wise 1985, 131). After the events at Caledon Bay and Woodah Island, debates concerning Aborigines and the legal system, Aboriginal relationship to the land and the rights of Aborigines to defend their land from outside intrusion took place as white Australians confronted issues in the twentieth century which had seemed buried for ever. Southern Aborigines expressed public sympathy for Aborigines in the Northern Territory and the whole case for white occupation of Australia was re-opened. The isolation of Arnhem Land, which was largely responsible for its unattractiveness to both Government and commercial ventures, meant that outsiders, from missionaries to trepang fishermen, were forced to be more sensitive to Aboriginal responses in their enterprises than elsewhere since they were more reliant upon Aboriginal assistance. This scenario makes Arnhem Land of particular interest in the study of contact history in Australia. That this situation prevailed until World War Two makes Arnhem Land unique.

The dramatic events in Arnhem Land in the 1930s, which were perceived as the struggle by Aborigines to exercise rights over country, laws and beliefs, became the catalyst for the consciences of white Australians. Although the 'Black War' did not achieve a lasting fame, consisting as it did of a series of random killings in a far away place, it marked a significant phase in the struggle for Aboriginal self-determination.

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In the 1930s Australia was stunned by a series of seemingly inexplicable murders of non-Aboriginal people perpetrated by the Arnhem Land Yolngu. After eight deaths in two years, newspapers were calling it the 'Black War'.

Missionaries, police and the media were equally convinced they knew the reasons for the killings. Following the arrest and trials of the alleged killers, non-Aboriginal Australia was forced to debate the issue of their occupation of the continent. In the process, issues of Aboriginal rights to justice and defense of their land were raised.

But what were the reasons for the 'Black War'? What was the situation in Arnhem Land in the period preceding the killings? *The 'Black War' in Arnhem Land* looks at the Federal Government policy and missionary settlement of Arnhem Land and analyses the events of the 1930s in the context of Australian race relations in the period leading up to World War II.

Mickey Dewar completed a BA(Hons) at the University of Melbourne in 1978. She came to Darwin in 1980 to study for a Diploma of Education and in the year following taught the Post Primary girls at Milingimbi Bilingual School. In 1982 she was transferred back to Darwin to work in the Materials Development Unit. She resigned from the Education Department in 1983. During the next six years she had two children, and taught part-time at the Darwin Institute of Technology while completing an MA(Hons) through the University of New England. In 1990, having gained a post-graduate scholarship, Mickey commenced full-time study towards a PhD in history at the Northern Territory University. She also works as a part-time history tutor at NTU and hopes to complete her doctoral studies in 1993.