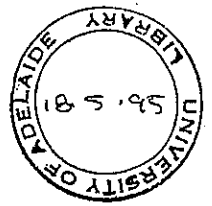


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The Caledon Bay and Woodah Island Killings 1932/33

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INTRODUCTION

I became interested in the Caledon Bay and Woodah Island killings of 1932/3 in the early 1950s when employed in the Native Affairs Branch, Northern Territory Administration, based in Darwin as a Cadet Patrol Officer. I felt I was just so important in 1952 when I was appointed a 'Protector of Aboriginals' under the terms of the Aboriginals Ordinance. Because the Native Affairs Branch purported to be a copy of its equivalent in Papua New Guinea, I was sent on various 'patrols' by senior officers charged with the responsibility of doing New Guinea style 'colonial' things in a country nothing like Papua New Guinea.

Census after census after census was conducted, but generally these were pointless exercises. [1] I was encouraged to write in 'officialese', so I never 'went' anywhere, I always 'proceeded'. One of my duties was to attend Darwin Police Court as 'Protector and next friend' to Aboriginals charged with minor offences like 'Aboriginal drink liquor' or 'being in a prohibited area between sunset and sunrise'. Anything more serious was passed on to legal counsel. I achieved some notoriety in 1953 when I made the national ABC radio news - Darwin was always over-supplied with journalists looking for stories - after I emotionally told the Court it was 'an absolute disgrace' that a Larakia Aboriginal named Bob Secretary could be arrested for being in the town of Darwin between sunset and sunrise when in fact Darwin belonged to the Larakia. Magistrate J W (Fatty) Nichols shook his head and gave me a look that clearly said: 'You'll learn, son'. Fortunately, I never did.

I developed a style that characterised the remainder of my public service career: find something interesting to do, go and do it, and tell my superiors later. I was lucky in that I was young and fit and genuinely interested in Aboriginals, without seeing any requirement to be 'starry-eyed' about them. There was a common love of sport and music, and generally Darwin and the surrounding settlements and missions were interesting and easy-going places. An impressionable youth could learn much if he kept asking questions and became one of the crowd, instead of trying to play 'I'm a government officer'.

It was an unexpected benefit that I was working for a government agency so full of its own importance that it did not organise a

training program for a young Cadet Patrol Officer other than to send me to attend the Australian School of Pacific Administration Training Course in Sydney in 1956. In the Northern Territory, for an important few years, I was able to drift around, learn a lot from Aboriginals, particularly language and songs, and read all the files and books in the Native Affairs Branch filing cabinets. At all times I heeded the sound advice given by my mother Grace, when I left my Melbourne home, aged sixteen: 'Wherever you go in life, keep sweet with the cook and be a good listener'. Sound advice, Grace.

One of the many fascinating files I read was *The King v Tuckiar: Murder*. It did not mean much to me at the time, but when I went to Umbakumba on Groote Eylandt in 1953 and met Fred Gray, the man who brought Tuckiar - whose proper name was Dhakiyara Wirrpanda - to Darwin, my interest was established. Later I was based at places like Groote Eylandt, Yirrkala and Maningrida in Arnhem Land. In Aboriginal terms I 'sat down'. I met many of the people involved in the events of 1932/33, which culminated in the Northern Territory Supreme Court trials of Tuckiar and other Yolngu.

Most previous accounts of the events and the trials are inaccurate or fanciful or both. Three writers not of events covered here, but relevant to an understanding of what happened, have my respect and admiration. Nancy Williams has written definitively about the traditional laws, beliefs and customs of the Yolngu. [2] Mickey Dewar has provided comprehensive background to the role of Christian missionaries in eastern Arnhem Land. [3] Andrew Markus, in *Governing Savages*, investigates the roles of the agencies and individuals who have implemented the many different policies imposed on Aboriginal people.[4]

I am extremely grateful to all people who have encouraged and assisted me, but Fred Gray and Jim Dorling deserve special mention. Since 1953 when I first met him at Umbakumba, Groote Eylandt, Fred Gray has been a friend and mentor. He is anxious that the true story of the 'Caledon Bay killings' be told, and he has patiently given his time and knowledge to me and to the many other people who have shown interest. From the outset Fred made his photographs, diaries and excellent memory unstintingly available.

Over many years Jim Dorling has provided information and provided a legal overview to my findings and hypotheses. He is probably not aware just how many long and relevant letters he has written over the twenty-five years we have been waiting for me to begin to write.

The Northern Territory Government, (through the NT Archives Service) awarded me - jointly with my friend Jeremy Long - the Northern Territory History Award of 1989. This work derives from that Award.

Nanyin Maymuru, Narritjan Maymuru, Munggurawuy Yunupingu and Mau Mununggurr were happy to give me all the information available to them; as they were eye-witnesses and participants in the events of 1932/33 their opinions and statements were crucial. I had lengthy and vital interviews with Ted Morey, the leader of the police party, Stewart McColl, the brother of Constable Albert McColl, and Joe (Pumeri) McGinness, a member of Fred Gray's crew at Caledon Bay in 1932. In 1954 I met and talked briefly with Aki Kinjo, the Japanese survivor of the Caledon Bay killings.

In 1976 at Yirkala I interviewed Djarparri Bulinjan Wirrpanda, the widow of Tuckiar, and wondered why the many other people who have written around these events did not see she was the most important person of all. She was an eye-witness to the killings of Traynor, Fagan and McColl. Her statements resolve some of the doubts that have always surrounded the Tuckiar case. Djarparri died at GarnGarn on 22 April 1986, still pondering her husband's fate after he was released from Fannie Bay Gaol on the afternoon of 9 November 1934. Other people are less unsure of what happened to Tuckiar.

Ian Wilson of Canberra is the custodian of many excellent photographs taken by his father Eric, who was, in 1934, the *Melbourne Herald* correspondent in Darwin. Ian kindly gave me access to these photographs, which are now held at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra. Carol Cooper was most co-operative in organising copies of Wilson Collection photographs.

This work is undertaken as a Master of Arts thesis, and I am grateful to the University of Adelaide for enrolling me. My supervisor, Dr Bill Gammage, is first and foremost a mate, but he has at all times disciplined me mercilessly. At the same time Bill maintains an infectious enthusiasm for scholarship and research generally, stimulates a love of Australian history particularly, and has a fierce determination that I will tell this fascinating story accurately and well.

Dr David Carment, Dr Nick Petersen, and Dr Campbell MacKnight all enthused about this project, and suggested I put aside doubts about my 'academic' ability, and 'tell the story'. Former workmates in the old Native Affairs Branch, Ted Evans and Jeremy

Long, were supportive always, and Ted Evans was particularly proud that two of his 'proteges' shared the 1989 History Award.

Professor Colin Tatz first encouraged me to tertiary study, and he has for many years been a profound influence on my life as an intellectual stimulus, a vital and dear friend, and a good judge of cricket.

The State Reference Library, Darwin, and the Australian and NT Archives Services in Canberra and Darwin should be proud of their staff members. They provide enthusiastic help to bumbling fools like me who know what they want but are totally inept at finding anything or using the simplest technological devices.

Speaking of technology, I once instructed my eldest son, Greg Egan, to have inscribed on my tombstone, 'Here lies Ted Egan. He knew nothing of computers'. Now, through Greg's enthusiasm and genius, I tap away on my little Powerbook Laptop, marvelling at the wonders of modern science. In the day-to-day operation of these amazing machines I constantly call on the skill of my Beloved, Nerys Evans, and she inevitably comes to my rescue. She reinforces me at all times and enthuses about the many projects in my life. At night we hold hands and she sings to me.

The families of Ted Morey, Jack Mahony and J A Carrodus gave generously of their time as I sought to understand better the period during which these events took place. Judith Stokes provided a 'Groote Eylandt overview' when she questioned old *Anintilyagwa* people exhaustively on my behalf.

Mrs Dorita Thomson gave me permission to reproduce the photograph of the young Djarparri taken by her husband, Dr Donald Thomson in 1935. What a pity my 1976 photograph of Djarparri was so amateurish. The passage of time does not necessarily bring improvement.

During his time as Administrator of the Northern Territory my mate Commodore Eric Johnston began to 'insist' that I write this account. He has hounded me ever since. Eric will be pleased to know that he will be invited to 'launch' the book when this thesis is published.

In the thesis I have elected to include the full text of several letters, reports and statements of evidence rather than try to provide summaries. Although much has been written about the important events, far too often they have been ignored in favour of speculation, causing many errors. While I do not claim that mine will be the final or definitive work on this topic, I feel that the presentation for the first time

of these unabridged accounts will give readers and future students a better chance to base their opinions soundly.

(Ted Egan)
ALICE SPRINGS.