

Alice Springs News, Issue 1032 September 10, 2003.

REAL TRUE HISTORY: THE CONISTON MASSACRE. Part One of a Feature by DICK KIMBER.

"That policeman came along. He lifted up that rifle shot my father. He fell down. My big brother was crying. He threw himself on my father's body, where the blood was coming out.

"That policeman [here George made the action of reloading a rifle] he lifted his rifle up again. Bang! My big brother been finish.

"I was just a little kid, standing there crying. That policeman [and again George made the rifle-loading action] he lifted up his rifle again. He pointed it at me. That (Another man, he lifted that rifle."

George made the hand action of the other member of the patrol, and recalled his words.

"Don't shoot him, he's only a little wee-ai."

That was the beginning of the Coniston Massacre from George Morton's perspective. George, a Warlpiri man, had been born in the Coniston area in about 1923, so was a five year-old boy at the time of the shootings. He appeared to bear no ill-will towards any other Australians because of it.

He had volunteered the story out of the blue, and laughed as he finished a way of deflecting blame from me. However, when I asked further questions he again laughed.

"They shot the wrong man," he explained. His father had not been the murderer - nor his brother.

To understand the Coniston Massacre of 1928, it helps to go back a little further in time. On 15th April, 1860 John McDouall Stuart had described the country in the valleys of the MacDonnell Ranges as "as fine a pastoral hill country as a man could wish to possess". He and his party, travelling north, had located and named Anna's Reservoir four days later. This is an unusually large rock-hole a short distance W.S.W. of present-day Aileron.

An "abundance of grass" in the vicinity, and description of the near Reynolds Range as being "well grassed with gum cks [creeks] coming from it with a little mulga scrub", led to it being taken up as the homestead base for a cattle station in 1884. (This was the same year that a baby boy christened William George Murray was born in farming country near Melbourne.

As was common with many farmers and other rural workers Australia-wide in that era, as he grew to manhood he joined a local defence unit, the Victorian Mounted Rifles.

To become a good horseman and rifle-shot was to be a good citizen, prepared to defend one's country).

The construction of the Overland Telegraph Line in 1870-1871 led to further exploration. Colonel Peter Egerton Warburton, after travelling along the northern side of the MacDonnell Ranges to Haasts Bluff, was the first outsider to pass through Warlpiri country.

He turned north from Haasts Bluff and, in the first fortnight of May, 1873, named Central Mount Wedge and, passing close to present-day Yuendumu, named Mount Hardy and other features of what is now Mount Doreen station country.

He then traversed the Tanami and Great Sandy Deserts to the Western Australian coast. W. C. Gosse, following west along the Reynolds Range, named the Lander River, the Warburton and Cockatoo Creeks, and Rock Hill near Yuendumu, in May, 1873.

He then turned south, seeing Warburton's tracks and camp at Central Mount Wedge before travelling still further south to give the first detailed written account of Uluru (Ayers Rock).

The rock-holes and soakage on the Lander that acted as a base depot from which Gosse could explore further west are the focal area for the various shootings which later collectively became known as the Coniston Massacre.

As earlier indicated, a cattle station was established at Anna's Reservoir in 1884, and in the next year was attacked, with the stores and the building being destroyed apart from its stone-work, and station-hands Figg and Coomb severely wounded.

This led to a police patrol west and then south, with Mounted Constable Wurmbrand, station owner Billy Benstead, one other station-hand, and Native Constables shooting 15 Aboriginal men.

The official report indicated that only one man was shot in self-defence but, as Billy Benstead noted, the word "dispersal" was used to obscure the details because it "sounded better."

According to T. G. H. Strehlow, another Wurmbrand patrol resulted in the shooting of people at Wurmbrand Rock, near Tilmouth Well on the Napperby Creek. Mounted Constable Willshire, who worked both independently and in close association with Wurmbrand to "pacify" Aborigines in the mid-late 1880's, was also responsible for the shooting of cattle-spearing and horse-spearing men on a similar patrol.

Beyond their reach, in the heart of Warlpiri country, a man called Japangarti took his wife in marriage by Warlpiri law.

They were to have four sons, all by Warlpiri social law called Japananga.

Such marriages continued, as they had from time immemorial, and among the next generation were children who later became known as Darby Jampijinpa and Major Jangala.

Of significance, too, was that in the winter of 1900 Allan Davidson led a prospecting party west of Kelly's Well, near Tennant Creek, to Hooker Creek and the Western Australian Border.

On the return journey they found the sites of the Tanami and Granites gold-fields, being told the Warlpiri name of the former by a Warlpiri man who was identified as of the "Uramulla" group by Davidson a variation, depending on pronunciation, of the term "Warramulla" or "Wallamulla".

This led to several prospecting parties, the Lawrie brothers included, travelling with camels from Hall's Creek, WA, to Tanami over the next decade.

The Lawries found good gold in 1909-1912 and returned to Hall's Creek.

There, several years later, they cared for a small boy, Alex Wilson, whose bushman father, as Alex told me, died an alcoholic, probably in Broome, and whose Aboriginal mother was speared to death.

The small rush of the 1909-1912 period also resulted in "about 60 men" being on the field when mining warden Lionel Gee visited in 1910.

Next year three other prospectors, who were trying their luck at The Granites, had their camp raided by Warlpiri warriors.

Shortly afterwards they murdered John Stewart by bashing in his skull with a tomahawk. Stewart had been, according to Gee, "a man of particularly kindly and good natured character" a view shared by his prospector-mates.

This murder led to the Warlpiri as a whole, the western "Warramulla" in particular, being regarded as dangerous people. They were "bad blacks" in whose country, as prospector-explorer Michael Terry indicated in 1927, a loaded revolver, loaded rifle and night-long watch were a necessary precaution.

The point is, though, that it was Warlpiri country, and the prospectors, pastoralists and other travellers were regarded, by the Warlpiri, as trespassers who damaged sacred sites, took over their key waters, and were often enough ruthless in other ways.

From a Warlpiri perspective they should have reciprocated with gifts of food and prized items, but by not announcing their travelling presence by lines of smokes, and by taking rather than giving, the intruders were acting as enemies.

That British rule, and a belief in benign conquest and settlement, prevailed in the capital cities, was unknown to the Warlpiri, and also had limited relevance to the cattle-men and gold-seekers on the frontiers.

NEXT WEEK: Gold boom and drought in the Tanami Desert.

Alice Springs News, Issue 1033 September 17, 2003.

REAL TRUE HISTORY: TENSIONS RISE AS LAND IS PARCHED.

Part Two of a Feature by DICK KIMBER.

The gold-fields, being "half-way" between the central Australian cattle-stations and Halls Creek, and the fact that the Federal Government took over the running of the Territory from South Australia in 1911, also led to other developments.

First, in 1909 John Bathern took up Napperby station, stocking it with 400 bullocks and his horse-plant of about 30, no doubt meaning to supply fresh meat to the miners as well as to southern markets. As with all stations of the era he soon had a team of local Aborigines working for him, and "bush blacks" on the periphery. Whenever a beast was killed it was, as Charles Chewings noted, "customary to give the blacks the head, feet, lungs, and entrails, and often the heart and liver", with the "working boys" receiving their share separately.

As old Bryan Bowman also recounted, the spearing of cattle on the edges of the far out stations, particularly when range country offered hideaways and escape routes, was still common in the 1920s and 30s. Such spearing had always increased whenever a drought occurred.

Secondly, and partly as a result of Davidson's earlier return through the general Napperby country, a prospecting, droving, and horse-stealing route was developed from Ryans Well on the Overland Telegraph Line through Napperby to The Granites and Tanami. (Joe Brown was the most famous of these prospectors and horse-thieves, and he kept the location of all of the waters he located, including Lake Surprise as it was later named at the end of the Lander River, to himself. It was always handy to know the location of a "secret" water when prospecting, or when dodging the police. Horse-stealing was just an honorable "game" for Joe).

Thirdly, there was a general Federal push to develop the Territory, including inspection of all of the pastoral potential, and encouragement of "claypan squatters" to take up the second-choice country.

Fourthly, legendary Sergeant Stott, based in Stuart Town (as Alice Springs was then known), became the key law-man in the Centre, ruling as Cecil Madigan later put it "with a rod of iron". However he was also a good family man, assisting with

establishment of the first school and hospital, supporting the work of Pastor Carl Strehlow at Hermannsburg Mission, and encouraging a strong sense of community. Fifthly and finally, there was a strong recommendation that the long-proposed Darwin - Oodnadatta railway should loop westerly through Tanami. Certainly there was much tub-thumping about extension of the railway but, while no extension through the Centre eventuated, the suggestion that it might encouraged others to consider the "desert" country as having greater potential than was the case.

By the beginning of World War 1, though, the old pick-and-shovel, dynamite and dry-blowing methods were no longer yielding more than "tucker money" at the gold-fields so that, when a drought also occurred, the cameleer prospectors abandoned the gold-fields. Some of these men enlisted, and from elsewhere in Australia, as soon as they were able to, W. (Billy) Braitling and William George Murray also enlisted. The latter, known as George by his mates, was an ANZAC at Gallipoli; both were decorated for bravery on the Western Front; and both came to be regarded as heroes by later generations.

The combination of the early actual and potential developments in the Tanami Desert country led Randal Stafford to take up station country in 1917. As Michael Terry notes, Randal came from a distinguished British family: his "great-grandfather led the charge of the Inniskilling Dragoons at Waterloo; his uncle was the first white child born in Victoria".

He named his station Coniston, in remembrance of one of the most beautiful parts of England. Decades earlier he had worked on stations in the Innamincka country, and one of his mates there was Frederick Brooks. Randal apparently kept in contact with Fred, for he helped Randal to establish the station in the early 1920s and, although working elsewhere from time to time, he returned to help out his old mate again in the late 1920s. At much the same time that Randal began stocking his property, William John ("Nugget") Morton took up neighbouring Broadmeadows. Nugget was an immensely powerful man. He showed his disdain for Aborigines by always sitting with his back to them in any camp. He was also ruthless and sadistic, the "cruellest" man Bryan Bowman ever knew.

Alex Wilson, who worked for Nugget when he first came to the Centre, was a short man, 1.6 metres tall with his down-at-heel boots on. His Halls Creek wife, an attractive young Aboriginal woman, was taken from him by Nugget who, when Alex protested, took up his stock-whip and whipped Alex so badly that he sliced open his back from shoulder to waist. Fifty years later Alex, commenting on what a bastard of a man Nugget had been, lifted his shirt to show me the huge scar. Alex had no reason ever to respect Nugget, but every reason to fear him as did most of the local Warlpiri people.

Meanwhile another old prospector and cattle-duffer, Jimmy Wickham, commenced poking about from the Lander country. While he kept notes of his travels, he was as close-lipped as Joe Brown about other matters. However, in 1925 he returned from the far west, and showed the late Margaret Hall (nee Nicker), who was visiting at a station "out west" of Ryans Well, a rich gold sample.

News of this rich find led to a swarm of prospectors out over the country and, while Jimmy's reef was never re-located, the country from Papunya to the Lander River, the Granites and Tanami, and out to the Western Australian border, was widely prospected. Among these prospectors was Paddy Tucker, son of Owen Springs station-hand George Tucker and his Aboriginal wife. Paddy was out west, both as a member of cameleer

prospecting parties and alone, "all over" the Warlpiri and eastern Pintupi country in 1925-1928 and, having a good ear for language, began to have a working knowledge of Warlpiri. And Joe Brown, now in his early 60's, was out there too, with Darby Jampijinpa as his camel "boy" assistant.

A dry spell, which commenced in 1923 in some parts, and increasingly developed into a universal drought as the next five years passed, began to have an impact on the Warlpiri, their south-eastern neighbours, the Anmatyerre, and their east-north-eastern neighbours, the Kaytetye (Kaitish).

In particular, the area from the Hanson Creek, almost due north of Alice Springs, through to the Lander River to the north-west, is important for this "Coniston story". Naturally this increasingly severe drought also had an impact on the cattle-station people of the north-west, in particular "Nugget" Morton on Broadmeadows and Randal Stafford of Coniston.

All other central Australians, and of course the natural bush foods as well as the cattle, horses, goats, and other domestic stock, began to suffer. Billy Braitling, who inspected much of the Warlpiri country in 1926 and prepared to take up what he later called Mount Doreen station, was unable to do so because of the drought until 1932.

As the dry times continued the Warlpiri, Anmatyerre and Kaytetye had begun to do as they always had at times of drought. They began to fall back on their longest-lasting and permanent waters, including the rock-holes and soakages of the Lander and Cockatoo Creek country now often opened up and used for watering stock. One important fall-back water was Yurrkuru Soakage.

Randal Stafford had named a nearby hill Mount Naval Action after a race-horse, and this name had also been loosely applied to the soakage. As with all distinctive features in the central Australian landscape it had totemic significance both in itself and in relationship to the surrounding country.

The Walpajirri bandicoot, native bee's honey ("sugar-bag") and Karnta (women) "Dreaming" trails all imbued the country here with their sacred life forces.

By this time Randal Stafford was living with a Warlpiri woman he called Alice, whose younger sisters were later to live with a prospector, wonderful tinsmith and sadly desperate alcoholic called McCormack, and with wiry Bryan Bowman, later owner of Coniston.

A concern that Randal had was that Jimmy Wickham, then at times intermittently camped further away on the Lander when out searching for his lost reef, was ruthless on Aborigines. As with numbers of the hard old Centre bushmen of the 1870s-1920s period, he was prepared to shoot first and ask questions later. Any Aboriginal who approached his camp without calling out and very obviously putting down his weapons, could expect to be shot.

NEXT WEEK: The Killing of Fred Brooks.

Alice Springs News, Issue 1034 September 24, 2003.

FRED BROOKS' KILLING SPARKED THE MASSACRE. Part Three of a Feature by DICK KIMBER.

EReal True History': Coniston Massacre

The Killing of Fred Brooks

Part 3 of an historical perspective by DICK KIMBER

(For Parts 1 and 2 see Alice News, Sept 10 & 17)

Special Note: There are many versions of what occurred in and about the time of Fred Brooks' killing.

The majority of the following notes are based on yarns Dick Kimber had in the 1970s with the Warlpiri men George Morton, Darby Jampitjinpa, Jimmy Jungurrayi, and a number of other Warlpiri people to whom he was kindly introduced by Harry Jakamara Nelson; with former drover, camel-man and prospector Paddy Tucker, of Arrernte-European descent; and with retrobate old bushman Nugget Hunter.

Then in the 1970s and '80s Dick had a number of yarns with Dinny Japaltjarri and Alex Wilson, the latter the station-hand and prospecting off-sider who was the last surviving member of the police patrol associated with the Coniston Massacre; and with Rex and Margaret Hall (nee Nicker), who had been all through the Ryans Well Coniston Granites Tanami country, and had looked after Jimmy Wickham in his pensioner years.

In the 1980s Dick yarned with legendary bushman Walter Smith; in the 1990s with Bryan Bowman, central Australian cattleman from the 1920s, and one time owner of Coniston station; and in 2003 with some of the last old Warlpiri and Anmatyerre people who remember any of the details.

These yarns have been complemented by research, yet every account varies. For considerably different versions readers are referred to Michael Terry's "Hidden Wealth and Hiding People" (c.1930), John Cribbins' "The Killing Times" (1984), and Peter and Jay Read's "Long Time, Olden Time" (1991). While John Cribbin's publication is partly creative fiction, it also usefully quotes in full the Commission of Enquiry.

Readers are also referred to the Central Land Council's notes of August 2003 entitled, "75th Anniversary of the Coniston Massacre Making Peace with the Past." The articles appearing in the Alice Springs News are intended to "make peace with the past" by presenting the history as accurately as possible, and allowing readers to make their own judgements.

For a range of reasons which will never be totally clear, the Warlpiri and neighbouring Anmatyerre people made a series of attacks on pastoralists and prospectors in the general Coniston Ryans Well area between 1926-1928.

In 1926 Bruce Chapman, a cameleer and station hand, had a large supply of rations pilfered at Mount Peake.

Later in the same year Mathews [probably George Mathews], who needed fresh native pasture for his cattle, walked a mob out to Mount Peake where, as Michael Terry records, one of a group of warriors told him, "This [country] no more longa white feller, longa black feller. White man can't sit down longa black feller. White man shift."

This is a clear enough statement about ownership of country, rejection of its use for cattle and a demand that the white man should "shift" back to where he had come from. Much as Mathews stood his ground at the time, he was constantly watched; thought that fires were deliberately lit to burn off native pasture he had intended to use for his cattle; and when, of necessity, away from his camp, had his rations and salted meat stolen. He shortly afterwards "shifted" back to the Telegraph Line country for safety.

At this time, George Murray, having joined the Territory police in 1919, without any training because of the dire need for police in remote localities, and having initially

served at Ranken River and Lake Nash, was appointed to Barrow Creek.

Out west the prospecting parties were searching for Jimmy Wickham's "lost reef". How benevolent or how ruthless they were is not known, but they were all armed with rifles and revolvers. Clearly they wanted a peaceful time, and cooperation from the Warlpiri, but they weren't taking chances. Rifles were essential for shooting game, but both rifles and revolvers were also carried for protection against "wild blacks".

One legendary young bushman, named Ben Nicker, came upon a recently shot warrior on the upper Lander in January, 1926. He rode onwards, keeping a close watch, and came to Jimmy Wickham's camp, where Jimmy was mending some harness. After greeting one another, they sat down to share a billy of tea. Ben, knowing Jimmy's reputation as a "a man who would shoot you as soon as look at you", but also being of a family Jimmy knew as friends, bided his time.

When Jimmy was again focussed on the leather-work, he casually mentioned, "I noticed a dead blackfellow up the creek a bit, Jimmy." Jimmy did not respond, focussing instead on the stitching, so after a time Ben repeated his comment. This time Jimmy responded.

"You always were a talkative lad, Ben, but you've never been that observant. If you'd looked more closely, you would have seen that there were two dead blackfellows there." They had approached Jimmy without waiting to be called up. He had shot them in case they had spears held between their toes, dragging them along so that Jimmy could not see them, or boomerangs, held in place by hair-string belts, hidden in the small of their backs. And his comment, very clearly delivered, was a warning to Ben too. Keep your mouth shut about matters that don't involve you.

By 1927 most of the prospecting parties had done what they could and, not finding the gold, the backing syndicates had cut their losses and the prospectors had moved on. Old Joe Brown was one of the few who kept at it.

As the drought increased, the Warburton, Lander River and Cockatoo Creek waterholes, with the exception of Boomerang Waterhole, dried up and, as they often did in any case, the Warlpiri and pastoralists alike relied on soakages.

Randal Stafford was still at his homestead on the Warburton, but Nugget Morton had shifted his camp up the Lander to a temporary home he simply called Mud Hut. Every indication is that he remained ruthless in his treatment of men and women alike. (Later accounts indicate that, following his custom of taking whichever women he wanted, he had raped some very young girls, and later again also killed an albino Warlpiri woman when she constantly fought him off).

Word came in to Randal Stafford of such incidents, and the ruthlessness of Jimmy Wickham and Nugget Morton troubled him. The few white men "out west" had to stick together, and depend upon one another in adversity however independent they generally were, but they also had their individual codes of conduct.

Because he had recently usurped numbers of the main waters, and had also taken an Aboriginal wife (Alice) who had previously been promised to a Warlpiri man, Randal also heard that threats were being made by "bush blacks" against his and Alice's lives. It may also have been that, being an easier-natured man than either Jimmy Wickham or Nugget Morton, he was perceived as an easier target for revenge. Randal was certain that the threats were not just boasting later a spear at night into his bunk bed, when he was fortunately absent, proved him correct.

It seems that John Saxby universally called Jack who was working for him, also very

much believed the rumours, and took practical precautions to prepare for this threatened attack.

Jack was so much a remote station worker (and intermittent prospector) throughout his life that Bryan Bowman thought that he must have been dodging the law about something. However he was a competent bushman and reliable bush worker, and Bryan also commented that he was an absolute marksman with a rifle.

On one of his rare visits to Stuart Town he went, as did everyone, to store-keeper George Wilkinson to pick up stores. Walter Smith, present at the same time, recalled being surprised at the quantity of rifle bullets he purchased. Fifty-four years later Walter still remembered that it was 1200 bullets.

Jack was no doubt purchasing them on behalf of Randal too and, in further preparation for what they believed was an imminent attack, they fortified the homestead as much as possible.

By now, as Dinny Japaltjarri put it during a yarn in 1980, the "long time, olden time people", finding that cattle had largely replaced kangaroos in the Coniston country, began spearing the cattle. Dinny's tone of voice did not suggest that this was a retaliatory thing so much as a logical outcome of the circumstances, a view not shared by pastoralists at the time.

Charles Young, a pastoralist on Cockatoo Creek who also spent much time prospecting with his mate Carter and an Aboriginal "camel boy", supported Randal's view that things were "bad" out Coniston way. He stated that in August, 1928 "close to Coniston < the niggers seemed to be out of control".

"They came round our camp and demanded food and tobacco. They all had spears and boomerangs and were semi-civilised blacks. In our party there were only two white men and one black boy. We were armed with Winchester rifles all the time. I fired over the heads of the blacks several times with the result that they cleared out.

"[On about 2nd August] < a few natives had demanded food and tobacco from us while about twenty or thirty others were hanging about carrying their boomerangs. As we shifted camp they would make demands for food and tobacco. They were the Lander River niggers. During our travels we met most of the people of the various stations [between Coniston and the Telegraph Line]. We heard complaints of everyone about the natives killing their cattle and goats, and the men from what I can gather were in a state of fear."

So concerned were the authorities with these and other threats, and the actual spearing of prospector Ted North in the shoulder, that Mounted Constables Don Hood and Dan Toohey were sent to establish a police outpost at Tanami.

Soon after they arrived "Warramullas" had raided Hood's camp and speared one of his best horses. The two police followed the spearmen's tracks and, in a confrontation, shot one of them. It was deemed a lawful shooting.

However as Michael Terry tells, by the time that the rumours reached the Alice Springs Telegraph Station, via "a mulga wire from bush blacks", the constables were involved in a "regular bust up", having had "a proper stand-up battle with a big mob of Wallmullas." It is likely that every incident out west was exaggerated in like manner, with every ten kilometres from the scene exaggerating the situation still more.

Meanwhile those more southern Warlpiri, focussed about Central Mount Wedge, Lake Bennett and major rock-holes such as Watulpunyu and Yaripilong (later taken up as

Mount Wedge, Newhaven and Gurner stations), commenced raiding down to the Glen Helen country. Here they began spearing cattle and, after an instant large meal, took just the choicest and most manageable bits, and returned to the safety of their distant range waters.

Fred Raggatt, owner of Glen Helen and, according to Bryan Bowman, the "meanest" man he had ever known, notified the authorities. Where Randal Stafford was more prepared to kill a beast to provide meat for Warlpiri station workers, knowing that some of the meat would be given to Warlpiri still living in the bush on the fringe of the station, Fred Raggatt was harder.

For decades he had saved every tin he had ever emptied, was so mean that he even saved his rarely used match-sticks, and he was definitely not inclined to be forgiving of anyone spearing his cattle. However, Randal Stafford didn't just run an open butcher shop for the Warlpiri either.

While all of this action was going on, in 1927 the first parliament was being opened in Canberra and, under The Northern Australia Act of 1926, Stuart Town became the capital of Central Australia in 1927.

Central Australia was a formally separate entity from the rest of the Territory, marked by the twentieth parallel of latitude, and old Sergeant Stott became Mr. Commissioner Stott. However, he retired to Adelaide in April, 1928 and, unused to the traffic, was killed by a train at Wayville a month later.

With his retirement the rule with a rod of iron, including over those police officers like George Murray who were directly responsible to him, was removed, and quite possibly with it the chance to keep the frontier circumstances in check.

He was replaced as Government Resident and Police Commissioner by John Charles Cawood who, having been born in about 1882, was of similar age to George Murray. He was a long-term public servant, qualified forester, magistrate, shire councillor and coroner from Parramatta and Bellingen in New South Wales, and had the assistance of an efficient public servant called V.G. Carrington in administrative work.

Despite his role as magistrate and coroner, there is no suggestion that he had actually engaged in police work, as had Sergeant Stott throughout his decades of life in the Territory.

Competent as he was as an organiser, John Cawood's appointment was akin to being "thrown to the wolves" in Central Australia. Proper accommodation was still under construction.

He found that his duties included the myriad roles that had accrued to Sergeant Stott: ensuring the policing of strict laws about where Aborigines had to camp to protect them from navvies working on construction of the railway line from Oodnadatta to Alice; hosting a stream of official visitors who were intent on seeing that this new "state" of Central Australia developed to its ever-envisaged potential of hundreds of thousands of settlers; and listening to the advice of long-term residents who always "knew" better than he did about anything and everything.

No sooner had he arrived, too, than he began to hear stories of unruly "blacks" and cattle-killing.

Shortly afterwards Randal Stafford and an eastern neighbour, T. Moar of Pine Hill, were so concerned with the problems and the threatening rumours that they requested that a police patrol be sent out into their station country. While arrests and a demonstration of

authority were officially intended, another expression, "teach them a lesson", was also used. It hinted at harsher treatment being acceptable.

The "government" news was of no direct consequence to the "outside" bushmen, including Joe Brown, Alex Wilson and two Warlpiri "camel boys." In late July Joe, who had been out looking for Jimmy Wickham's lost gold-reef again, had fallen very ill with beri-beri at Tanami, but with Alex Wilson's and the Warlpiri men's help continued for a time towards Coniston.

When Joe's pain was very great, Alex made him comfortable in a bush camp near Mount Hardy, left a canteen of water by his side, told the Warlpiri men to look after Joe and the camels, and began to ride as fast as he could towards Coniston for help. This was possibly the 6th August.

At this stage Paddy Tucker, who had been "out west" prospecting, was also making his way in with his camel-team towards Coniston, while the 20-year-old Bruce Chapman, having a spell from prospecting, was at a camp 30 kilometres down the Lander from the station homestead.

A little earlier Randal Stafford had become concerned that he had not been able to repay a sizeable handshake loan from his old mate, Fred Brooks. Fred was not at all worried about this. He was 61, 65 or 67 (his death certificate has been differently interpreted, and other estimates were made at the time), and was contented with bush life.

He was unusual in not having an Aboriginal wife, or a series of short-term relationships. (As Old Bryan Bowman generalised, "All of them had them, and, I say, those who said that they didn't were, I say, I say, liars.") Fred was kind to the Warlpiri children, but had a strict rule, commonly applied by many white men on the frontier, that the Warlpiri men must always camp beyond the accurate spear-throwing distance of about 60 metres.

As it became apparent that Randal could not walk his cattle down to the Adelaide market, which was already flooded with closer-in stock from northern South Australia and the eastern states, Fred decided to have a spell away from the homestead, and do a bit of dogging, using Yurrkuru Soakage, 20 kilometres west of the station, as his base. The trapping, poisoning and shooting of dingoes was a common enough bush occupation, as they were considered vermin, and the government paid good money for every scalp (the proof of a killing).

Randal, who was about to go into Teatree, was concerned at his old mate's welfare, and warned him to be very wary because of the continuing bush telegraph news coming in from the west of an impending attack on Coniston.

However Fred, while taking his usual precautions, dismissed the concerns. After all, having now lived in the Coniston country for most of the last seven years, he felt he "knew" the local Warlpiri people.

He left Coniston on the 2nd August, 1928, taking two camels, two Aboriginal youths known as "Skipper" and "Dodger" as "camel boys" and dogging assistants, bullock hides to keep him occupied making saddles, and the equipment necessary for trapping and poisoning dingoes.

Late that day they set up camp at Yurrkuru Soakage (Brook's Soak), Fred in his and, as he always demanded, Skipper and Dodger at a distance in theirs. A number of Warlpiri families were also camped near the soak. Fred and his assistants presumably knew some of the Warlpiri camped there; some would have visited or done seasonal work at the station.

It is probable that Fred established a daily routine, with himself primarily attending to equipment and simply relaxing, and Skipper and Dodger regularly taking the camels out to patches of good feed away from the soakage, and laying poison baits for dingoes at localities that gave the best opportunity for "dog-stiffening".

From this point onwards there are many variations to the story. The strengths and weaknesses of oral history, which are often also the strengths and weaknesses of written history, are illustrated throughout the Coniston Massacre story. Two accounts of the same incident will be given here.

First, a boy called Lala, who had been present at the Warlpiri camp at Brooks' Soak (Yurrkuru), gave the following account.

He had heard two warriors, Padygar and Arkikra (apparently the man later known as "Bullfrog"), plotting to kill Fred Brooks [on the evening of the 6th August]. A "big mob" of other men also agreed to assist. After killing him they intended to take his tucker and tobacco. [On the morning of the 7th] they attacked, while a woman held Fred's hand behind his back. Padygar hit old Fred on the head with a yamstick "a mob" of times, while Arkirkra hit him several times on the head with an axe. Other men also hit him with boomerangs and axes. After killing him they put old Fred in a "bag" [his mosquito net] and out him in a rabbit hole. Lala saw Padygar and Arkirkra then take tucker, tobacco and steel knives.

NEXT: A different version of events.

Alice Springs News, Issue 1035 October 1, 2003.

CONISTON MASSACRE: "I TOLD THEM TO SCATTER". Part Four of a Feature by DICK KIMBER.

'Real True History': Coniston Massacre.

The Killing of Fred Brooks: another version.

Last week's issue concluded with a plain enough, brief account of Fred Brooks' murder, yet it had an error of identification.

Bullfrog's correct Warlpiri name was, as 90 year old Jack Ross Jakamara told me, Kamalyarrpa Japanang-ka.

Arkirkra was another man, and it was he and Padygar who were identified by Lala as key assailants of Fred Brooks.

Lala's account can reasonably be questioned a little.

Since Lala was not part of the attacking group, but instead remained in the nearby camp, how much had he actually witnessed rather than heard about immediately afterwards?

Why didn't he mention Kamalyarrpa "Bullfrog" Japanangka at all?

Furthermore, since he had been with George Murray, other patrol members and at times Randal Stafford for almost a month after the event, was he omitting anything, or emphasising certain aspects, to assist the police case?

Why does he imply only three assailants, then ten and also a "big mob" of about twenty? One can question the detail without disagreeing with its general accuracy.

The second account is substantially based on Paddy Tucker's account (with minor additions). Over the years 1925-1933 Paddy travelled the Warlpiri country with his camels, prospecting, dogging and taking the loading out to the Granites gold field, and he heard different elements of the "Coniston story" throughout this time. Warlpiri accounts

normally tell of Bullfrog having two wives, but Paddy's story varies from this. Bullfrog Japanangka was one of a sizeable group of Warlpiri camped at Yurrkuru. He had three wives. Fred Brooks, probably with rifle in hand, asked-demanded of Bullfrog that he loan him two wives, one named Marungarli, to help him gather firewood and generally act as camp assistants.

While Jimmy Jungurrayi and other Warlpiri people have stated or presumed, as did Bryan Bowman, that he wanted them for sexual relationships, Paddy Tucker learnt that he had wanted them to wash his clothing as a priority, for other domestic tasks, and just generally as domestic company. Some other Warlpiri accounts also support this view. Paddy believed that Fred, who was in his sixties, was "past it" as far as sex was concerned. He still had a bushman's hardness, but was just about worn out from decades of demanding bush work. Randal Stafford claimed that Fred never had relationships with Aboriginal women, a view supported by Missionary Annie Lock at Harding Spring (well east of Coniston).

Fred's camp was reasonably close to the soakage, but far enough away to allow animals to drink at the water without being disturbed. As was Fred's practice, he was firm in ensuring that all Warlpiri, including Bullfrog and his young wife, camped at a distance from his camp, which meant still further away from the soak. For the use of his two wives, who were to remain at his camp, Bullfrog was promised some rations.

Other Warlpiri who were in the vicinity also visited the soakage and, despite his vigilance, some pilfered items from Fred's supplies.

On the 4th August the prospecting party of Charlton Young, his mate Carter and their "camel boy" stopped at the soakage. They told Fred of the demands that Warlpiri had made of them a little further west, and learnt from Fred that some had been "ratting" his camp.

On the 5th Bullfrog decided to move on, but Fred still wanted the two women to assist with domestic duties, and was emphatic that they stay. (No doubt he wanted to demonstrate his continuing authority and superiority at the camp, again as was almost universal practice at the time).

Although he was a man who fulfilled promises, he had not given Bullfrog any food or tobacco at this stage. This delay annoyed Bullfrog, but he decided to wait another day. His young wife had, as always, stayed with him in their camp.

When Bullfrog was ready to leave on the 6th August, Fred again was emphatic that he wanted the two women to stay in his camp, and do some more washing. Bullfrog was angry now but, while keeping his anger in check (Fred had a rifle in his camp and carried a revolver, and Bullfrog knew their power), brooded on the issue.

Fred could, as Bullfrog knew, easily have done his own washing, even though this was conventionally a woman's task in such domestic arrangements, and even though he was also daily involved in repairing leather harness and camel saddles.

Dinny Japaltjarri implied, in a yarn about "early bird" days in 1980, that Bullfrog expressed his anger to other Warlpiri men who were camped near Yurrkuru, and that they agreed to help him get back his wives. Other Warlpiri accounts indicate the same. (At this point of the story my personal reaction is to feel sorry for Bullfrog, and to consider that Fred was being, at best, unwise).

Early on the cold morning of the 7th August Fred sent "Skipper" and "Dodger", his Aboriginal "camel boys", to bring up the camels, which had been hobbled out a

considerable distance away on a patch of good feed. They had either broken their hobbles or moved an unusually long distance away during the night. As Skipper and Dodger knew, through the universal established practice of the era, they would receive their breakfast when they returned with the camels.

Shortly after they had departed Bullfrog awoke to find the last of the wood used up, the fire down to embers, and his young wife gone. She had decided to follow the walking pad quietly down by Fred's camp to the soakage to get a coolamon of water, then return, collect wood and make up the fire.

In the dawn light Bullfrog only saw that her tracks went straight to old Fred's camp. He became enraged. Old Brooks had taken his third wife while he was asleep!

He put his steel tomahawk and boomerang in his hair-belt, so that they rested against the small of his back and could not be seen. (Other Warlpiri men, knowing his plan to take his wives back, must have been signalled to, and immediately began a swift, stealthy approach too).

He approached Brook's camp, where the fire was blazing with warmth as Bullfrog's was not, and the two older wives were moving about. Fred was sitting close by, working on replacing old laces with fresh ones on greenhide pack bags.

Bullfrog strode angrily towards the camp, without Fred noticing him, then called out in Warlpiri to his two wives, "Grab him by the hands! Hold his arms!" The two young women caught Fred as he was getting to his feet and, with their wiry strength, managed to hold on as Fred frantically struggled to free himself and get his rifle.

Other Warlpiri men rushed forward to join in. Bullfrog stepped in and struck him in the throat with the boomerang and on the head with the tomahawk. Others also struck him with clubs and boomerangs. His death was almost instantaneous, and it seems that his body was severely mutilated during and immediately following the attack.

As can be seen, Paddy's story varies considerably from Lala's, yet there are certain of the same basic elements in both accounts.

Confirmation of these basic elements were recorded by Petronella Vaarzon Morel when, in speaking with Rosie Nungurrayi for "Warlpiri Womens Voices" (1975), Rosie recounted:

"At Yurrkuru my grandfather killed a whitefella. He hit the whitefella because the whitefella stole his wife. That old lady was my grandmother, a Napurrula. She was frightened when that whitefella took her that's why the old man hit him."

After Fred had been killed a nearby rabbit burrow which had already been opened up by Warlpiri digging for rabbits (though one account suggests that it was actually opened up as Fred's grave) was used as his grave. He was hastily and incompletely buried one booted foot still stuck out of the shallow grave.

Bullfrog and his wives took what food and tobacco they wanted and as had earlier been intended left for another part of their country. As Rosie Nungurrayi stated:

"After that the old man ran up to the hills to hide. My grandfather was living in the hills, in a cave. That's what saved his life while the police were out looking for him. He stayed in the hills. They didn't find him because he was sitting in the cave."

On the basis of these and other accounts I can fully comprehend Bullfrog's anger at having his wife (or wives) taken from him, and his impression of broken promises (rather than delayed fulfillment of them).

However, I don't condone murder, so certainly also feel compassion for old Fred Brooks.

It is also possible, as Randal Stafford and Nugget Morton believed, that Randal had been the white man whom the Warlpiri wanted to kill. Perhaps Fred, being Randal's long-term best mate, akin in Aboriginal eyes to a brother, "took his place" because Randal was away.

It was still early morning when Skipper and Dodger returned with the camels to find other Warlpiri pilfering the last of the supplies and other useful items. They were threatened in a way that left little to their imagination, and told not to tell anyone of the murder, but instead, if asked about "Old Freddie", to say that he had "fall down by himself" (giving the impression of a heart-attack) and been buried.

Happy to be escaping with their own lives, but also terrified, they rode as fast as their camels allowed to Coniston station homestead.

They found other Aboriginal station workers there (Randal Stafford was at Tea Tree and Jack Saxby was apparently digging and timbering a new well "out west"), so sent word of the murder by them to Bruce Chapman, who was camped a day's ride away on the Lander. He must have learnt the news late on the 7th August, and immediately prepared for travel by camel in to Coniston.

Paddy Tucker, whose story of what transpired has already been told, had camped west of Yurrkuru on the 6th August. He had risen early on the 7th, had his breakfast, and intended travelling east as far as possible with his camels that day.

He came to Yurrkuru, by which time apparently all of the other Warlpiri who had been camping nearby had left. He saw the scattered stores and, realising that something was amiss, searched about and quickly found the murdered white man (he did not know who it was at this stage). Paddy then decided that there was no point in delaying, and continued on his way.

The first Aboriginal groups he met already knew of the murder and, through them (no doubt in whispers because one should not mention the recently deceased), he learnt that it was Fred Brooks who had been killed.

As Paddy believed that the murder would result in a reprisal police patrol, he earnestly told them to "scatter." However, each group he met, whether they had heard of the killing or not, rejected his advice: "We alright. We been working longa station."

No matter how much Paddy advised them to "scatter", they were confident in their own minds that, when they were recognised as having had associations with the different stations, they would be recognised as "friends" of the white people, and not be harmed. Paddy rode on, feeling sorry for old Fred, and fearing what was likely to happen.

As the frightened station Aborigines at Coniston already knew what had happened, he continued with his camel team towards Ryans Well, letting the few pastoralists he met thereafter over the next few days know what had occurred, and relying on them to pass the message on to the authorities in Alice Springs.

As it transpired, another person's news of the tragedy arrived in Alice Springs earlier than did Paddy's. He repeated his warning to Anmatyerre Aborigines he met as he approached the Telegraph Line "Scatter!"

The further following reconstruction of events is also based on several different, and at times seriously conflicting, versions. That a buggy was used is based on an undated note by Bruce Chapman, which refers to buggy horses.

Normally one would not have expected many bush workers to be passing by Yurrkuru, but late on the 7th Alex Wilson also found the scattered camp evidence and then the

body. He instantly knew, as he told me, that there would be "hell to pay!" Alex left everything as it was and, rather than making camp, rode on through the night to Coniston station. He must have arrived there very late on the 7th and, learning that Bruce Chapman had been called for, awaited his arrival while resting and watering his riding camel in case he immediately had to use it again to race back to Joe Brown. When Bruce arrived presumably by midday on the 8th Alex told him of finding Brooks murdered, confirming what the Aboriginal messengers had already told Bruce. However he also told him that Joe Brown was in desperate need of help. Bruce then used a loyal old Aboriginal stockman, "Old Percy", to send a note east to Randal Stafford, letting him know of his old mate's murder and telling him that he was about to leave, taking the buggy horses to rescue Joe Brown. Randal received this note at Tea-tree on the 11th August and, with the help of cameleer-bushman and station man Bob Purvis (senior), passed the details on to Commissioner Cawood in Alice Springs. It seems that while Alex was getting the horses in for the buggy, Bruce made a flying trip to Yurkurru and, finding Fred's body wrapped in his mosquito net in the shallow grave, dug a formal grave, buried him properly, and erected a post-and-rail fence about it. (An alternative account is that he formally buried Fred after the police party had briefly examined his body and then reburied it at a very shallow depth). Michael Terry's photograph of Brooks' grave, captioned to indicate that Bruce Chapman had dug it deeper in the same rabbit burrow as used in the initial shallow burial, is presumed to be where the present headstone is. Alex and he then travelled on to the camp near Mount Hardy to find that the two Warlpiri men, believing that Joe was going to die and knowing that he was helpless, had callously stripped his clothes from him, taken the remaining tucker, and fled. In that Mount Hardy is over 100 kilometres from Coniston, Alex and Bruce, by pushing the horses and themselves, and by making late camp and early start, must have arrived there early on the 10th September. The two rescuers wrapped him in what they could, then began to lift Joe onto the buggy. While they were still lifting him, he gave a moan, odd yellow fluid spilled from his nose and mouth, and old Joe was dead. They buried him near his camp, on the edge of a small claypan. Bruce then apparently left Alex to come in more slowly with Joe Brown's camels while he returned to Coniston at a slightly faster rate with the horse-drawn buggy. Alex must not have wasted any time, for he was back at Coniston with the camels on the 12th. Bruce had apparently already left for his own camp thirty to forty kilometres away on the Lander. Whatever time Bruce returned to his own camp, he soon felt unwell, so packed his gear and made, via Billy Briscoe's far west camp, for the Overland Telegraph Line. He must have spelled often, and travelled on slowly, before he met Jimmy Wickham and his cattle-man partner Mathews at their Mount Peake camp. Mathews travelled on with him towards Ryans Well. Ten kilometres west of this well the Michael Terry party, coming in from the west by motor vehicle, met them and, because Bruce had "something wrong with his head; awful aches and pains and swellings", he was given a lift into Alice Springs on 3rd September. There, despite the care of nursing sisters and an emergency dash by a doctor, he died of

meningitis on 9th September. As Michael Terry recounted, "his funeral < was the largest anyone had yet had in Stuart; twenty-seven mourners saw him lowered to his last camp." Seventy-five years later, to the day, with the *Acacia victoriae* in flower and a blue sky overhead, I sat by his grave at the old George Crescent Cemetery in the Alice. I felt that I knew him just a little: "In Loving Memory/ Of/ Henry Bruce Farrington/ Deeply Loved Eldest Son Of/ HB & IFP Chapman/ Who Passed Away 9th Sept 1928/ Aged 20 Years/ Peacefully Sleeping." I hoped that he was "peacefully sleeping."

All of this is tragically straight-forward enough, and incidentally the numbers at the funeral indicates how very few Australians of European descent lived in central Australia.

NEXT: Another resentment that Bullfrog may have felt towards Brooks. The massacre begins.

Alice Springs News, Issue 1036 October 8, 2003.

CENTRE'S ROUGH FRONTIER JUSTICE: REVENGE MURDER, WRONG MAN DIES. Part Five of a Feature by DICK KIMBER.

Last week's issue presented an account of the murder of Fred Brooks that suggested the motivation for the killing was Brooks' refusal to return the wives of the killer, Kamalyarrpa Japanagka or "Bullfrog". The women had been doing domestic work in Brooks' camp and Bullfrog had not received his promised payment of food and tobacco. I have also been told of another deep-seated resentment that Bullfrog felt towards Fred Brooks.

"I think he [Fred Brooks] had a brother, old policeman name of Brooks, " explained legendary old bushman Walter Smith.

Old Darby Jampitjinpa independently confirmed this perception. "That old Brooks, him bin have a brother. Old policemen. Him bin shootem three brother belong Bullfrog." Could this have been so?

Paddy Tucker's perception that Bullfrog had, at least at the crucial time of the murder of Fred Brooks, three wives suggests this possibility, for he would be likely to become the caring husband of his brother's widows. But what of Fred Brooks' brother, the policeman? Charles Edward Brookes (not Brooks) was born in Adelaide on 1st August, 1847. He was 5'10" tall and working as a drover when he joined the S.A. Mounted Police in September, 1873. He then served for most of the period 1874-1911 in the Northern Territory. His police record of service simply indicates "Northern Territory" for much of his service, but the relevant entries indicate that he was at Barrow Creek in 1883-1886, and in Alice Springs from July, 1898 to April, 1905.

I have not been able to find any formal record of patrols that would indicate the possibility of Mounted Constable Charles Brookes having been involved, but Major Jangala told the following account, which can be dated to 1911-1912. Major learnt it from his father.

A Mounted Policeman with two Native Constables travelled from the Overland Telegraph Line out into Warlpiri country. He arrested six men near the Granites, and commenced the journey back to the Telegraph Line. One Warlpiri man, who had been resting in the shade about 50 to 100 metres away when the arrests were made, had crawled and then run away while the arrests were being made, but when sure of his safety then returned and followed the patrol.

He was able to obtain water and camp a short distance off the line of march because he knew the rockholes and soakages of the country. Very occasionally he "finger-talked" to the prisoners, suggesting possibilities of escape, but had to be extremely careful, and normally stayed out of sight except at sundown and sunrise.

Each night the prisoners were chained to trees with neck-chains, one to a tree so that they could not readily contrive an escape. After a few days the policeman made a decision. He was friendly in manner as he gave each man along an almost straight line of trees some breakfast and a drink of water, and Major envisaged him saying to each prisoner, "Sorry old man". When they had finished their meal and drink, he and the Native Constables stood off at a short distance and shot them all. They took the chains off, left the men who were shot for the wedge-tailed eagles, falcons, crows and dingoes, and rode back towards the Overland Telegraph Line. The man who had been following the group fled, and became the teller of the story.

There is no confirmatory evidence whatsoever that Mounted Constable Brookes was the constable involved, and it is unlikely that he was the policeman because he was based at Illamurta from 1905. However it may be that his patrols of the 1880s and 1898-1905 involved travel into Warlpiri country, or that his name has become linked to a series of incidents involving other police. He must therefore be presumed entirely innocent unless a formal record can be located.

At the same time, I have no reason whatsoever to doubt Major Jangala's story. I knew him for years, travelled his country with him, and he was a man of strong character and integrity. I therefore do believe that an unknown policeman, not wishing to go through the trouble of long travel with Warlpiri prisoners and a court case, committed murder in the name of rough frontier justice well south-east of The Granites in about 1912.

Whatever the case, Mounted Constable Charles Brookes was not the brother of Fred Brooks, but the confusion is understandable. Bullfrog's long-term deep-seated resentment was real because his three brothers had been shot, but derived from an incorrect perception (which was shared by Walter Smith and Darby Jampitjinpa) about the "brother" relationship.

In brief summary of the above, general resentment about pastoralists and prospectors was felt by the Warlpiri of the Lander River country, and Anmatyerre of the Lander and further east. It is clear that the drought increased the tensions, and that at least one group did not want cattle in their country. There is a strong possibility, in fact, as Michael Terry believed, that sizeable groups of them planned to drive cattle men from their country, in particular Randal Stafford at Coniston. However, the primary reason for the killing of Fred Brooks was that he would not return Bullfrog's wife (or wives) to him, and had not fulfilled his promise to pay Bullfrog in rations and other items.

Explorer-pro prospector Michael Terry, who first learnt of the killing of Fred Brooks from Harry Tilmouth later in 1928, formally gave the name Brooks' Soak to Yurrkuru, (though the map-makers confused matters by spelling it Brookes' Soak). A few years later he delivered a marble headstone, purchased by Randal Stafford, which was erected at the head of the grave. Its inscription reads: "In Memory of / Frederick Brooks / Murdered on 7th / August 1928. / Old Man In The Early / Days of Coniston, / Those Days When Our / Troubles Were Great / In The Years You & I / Worked Together / I Found You A True & / Staunch Mate. / His Old Mate / Randal Stafford."

To return now to the second week of August 1928: Mounted Constable George Murray

had been instructed by Commissioner Cawood to investigate the cattle killings that had been reported from the Pine Hill and Coniston station country. He was on his way with two native constables in a motor vehicle, apparently certain that he would be able to borrow horses from Randal Stafford for any patrols, when John Cawood received Randal Stafford's telephone call telling him that Fred Brooks had been murdered.

It appears that Randal Stafford was told by Commissioner Cawood that George Murray was on his way, for Randal left TeaTree, met him and informed him of Brooks' murder. George Murray then returned to Ryan's Well where, in telephone conversation with John Cawood, he was told to arrest the culprits and also to give assistance to Joe Brown. In the light of the rumours he had been hearing, as well as the reported facts of cattle-killings, threats of an attack on Randal Stafford, and now the murder of Fred Brooks, it is surprising that John Cawood's message to Mounted Constable Murray did not include to await further reinforcements of police from Alice Springs, Arltunga, Hatches Creek and Tanami. Perhaps, though, and understandably he had enough been impressed with George Murray's war service record and the fact that he had been a successful policeman-bushman on remote police outposts for nine years. Furthermore, it was clearly urgent that help be given to Joe Brown.

Whatever the case this good man Cawood, so recently arrived from a part of Australia where the last frontier violence had occurred in his grandfather's time, simply does not seem to have envisaged the possibilities of what "teach them a lesson" might have meant. I suspect that he thought it meant that several arrests would be made and that at worst, in the event of "a proper stand-up battle" such as had been reported out at Tanami, only the main culprit, throwing spears and boomerangs rather than surrendering, might be shot rather than arrested.

Instead he later found that he had been the local Police Commissioner and Administrator distantly out-of-contact in charge of a punitive party.

An odd aspect is that, although John Cawood was the Police Commissioner, he appears not to have been influenced at all, at the time, by his newly appointed Stuart Town police sergeant, Sergeant Charles Herbert Noblet. Noblet had been a policeman for over 25 years, with "between 19 and 20 years' experience of blacks" when appointed to Stuart Town in April, 1928. That he had no role in matters until the very end of the police patrol, and then only in Alice Springs, seems quite extraordinary.

Although he later implies a defence of sorts by claiming an excessive work-load, with focus on mining matters, the possibility is that he was covering something up. Again, though, it indicates the possibility that things may well have been very different had old Sergeant Stott still been in charge.

The membership of this police party is worth considering in brief detail.

Mounted Constable George Murray, the leader, had lived through the glory years of the British Empire. He would undoubtedly have formally learnt of some of the heroic battles (as they were then presented) of his parents' and his own era, and known at first hand as neighbours some of the participants. The Zulu Wars in South Africa, and the Charge of the Light Brigade at Sebastopol in 1854 were universal folk-lore, with place-names throughout Australia commemorating them. Similarly the deeds of Lord Roberts in India and South Africa, the Relief of Mafeking during the South African War of 1899-1902, and all of Lord Kitchener's deeds were heroically portrayed. (Indeed, the author of these articles, Dick Kimber learnt these stories of heroic charges and relief victories during his

1940s education. Empire Day was a big day back then.)

George had voluntarily trained, effectively as a cavalryman, in his youth. However the circumstances of his World War 1 service had meant that he had not had the opportunity to take part in the last great Light Horse charges. It is likely that he regretted not being with some of his Victorian mates in the famous charge at Beersheba, the last great cavalry charge in history. While there is no doubt that, having served as a soldier throughout World War 1, he had displayed courage on numerous occasions, he probably thought that he had "missed out" on greater heroic possibilities. He had been 30 at the commencement of the War in 1914, and the good fortune that had allowed him to survive five dreadful years might be considered to have run out.

A man of 44 years of age can remain brave, yet also has a sense of his own vulnerability. Furthermore, much as he no doubt applied common sense to his tasks, he was not formally trained as a policeman.

It is also inconceivable that, during his spare time at Barrow Creek, he had not read the official correspondence associated with the attack by Kaytetye warriors there 55 years previously, which had resulted in two telegraph station men being speared to death and others wounded.

The police instructions of the time had included that the ammunition not be spared. And, since the police party included a majority of bushmen volunteers, and justice must be seen to be done, it was also officially sanctioned that the rules of law could be flexibly interpreted.

(This flexibility appears to have been used in reports about the numbers of Kaytetye killed during patrols: the official figure is nine, but several other accounts suggest that "scores" were shot).

Even if this was not at all in George's mind, the latest news of frontier violence in the region into which he was going was that two of his fellow police officers, following the spearing of a police horse, had shot the main culprit and been exonerated.

He also understood that there had been cattle-killing and threats of violence to the cattlemen, and that a long-term frontier-experienced station hand had been killed.

His formal instructions from Cawood were to arrest the culprits, avoid violence in the process, and yet not to put the police party's lives at risk. He also tacitly understood that it was acceptable that he "teach them a lesson" a phrase without specific instructions about the method of teaching. As he did not know either the Warlpiri or Anmatyerre language, he was at a disadvantage given that he was the leader.

And it is perhaps also worth keeping in mind that George Murray would have accepted and agreed with all state and later federal governments, the missionaries, the experts, and the statistical evidence of the entire 1860s to 1940s period, that Aborigines were "a vanishing race", undoubtedly "doomed to extinction."

Native Constable Paddy was the Aboriginal tracker who had accompanied him as he left Stuart Town, and he was armed with a revolver. He was a Western Aranda man from Lukaria, a site on the northern side of the MacDonnell Ranges, a little west of north of Glen Helen, so could not speak the language of the Warlpiri and Anmatyerre of the Lander River country. According to Pastor P. Scherer this was "Police tracker Paddy Patika ("Padygar"), who served under Mounted Constable W.G. Murray [and] acquired notoriety in connection with the punitive expedition "under consideration".

Bryan Bowman, who knew him and had heard of his deeds in the Coniston country and

elsewhere, described him as "murderous", as did noted linguist and 1930s patrol officer T. G. H. Strehlow. In that another man called Padygar is later mentioned, the tracker will hereafter be referred to as "Police Paddy", the name by which he was widely known. Police Tracker Major is an unknown figure in any detail, and was armed with a revolver. He also appears to have been unable to speak either the Anmatyerre or Warlpiri languages, as Alex Wilson was used as the speaker in numbers of instances. (He is not the Warlpiri man who became known as Major Jangala).
NEXT: Murray recruits a posse and the massacre begins.

Alice Springs News, Issue 1037 October 15, 2003.

CONISTON MASSACRE: POSSE STARTS ITS MURDEROUS WORK.

Part Six of a Feature by DICK KIMBER.

©Real True History': The Coniston Massacre Part Six of an historical perspective by DICK KIMBER.

(This series has been published in weekly instalments since September 10.)

Mounted Constable George Murray, accompanied by Aboriginal police trackers, "Police Paddy" and "Major", arrived at Coniston Station on the 12th August, 1928.

Here Murray learnt from Alex Wilson that Joe Brown had died, which meant that he could focus solely on planning the pursuit of the murderer and accomplices responsible for Fred Brooks' death (7th August), as well as the cattle-killers.

He was still at Coniston on the 15th August when two warriors named Woolingar and Padygar arrived at the station.

When they resisted arrest by trackers Police Paddy and Major, and an altercation developed during which Woolingar swung a neck-chain at Murray, he drew his revolver and shot Woolingar over the eye.

Although Woolin-gar's wound was serious, the two arrested men were chained to a tree overnight, which was conventional practice at the time when police cells were not available.

While at Coniston Murray had also been busy interviewing Aborigines about Fred Brooks' murder.

No doubt Skipper and Dodger, who had a command of "bush English", were encouraged/obliged to assist in discussions with the arrested men, Padygar and Woolingar. Alex Wilson was probably obliged to assist too.

According to Murray another 20 names of people said to have been implicated in Fred Brooks' murder and the pilfering of his camp were obtained. (If this list still exists it would be interesting to know who was on it. Bullfrog's brother-in-law relations of the Japurula sub-section, and their Napanangka wives, would be likely to be included).

Murray was now faced with a problem. If 20 people were to be arrested, then a larger patrol was needed, so the formal police party was now joined by the following men:- Randal Stafford, who had returned to his homestead on the 15th, was a well-educated resilient bushman who had experienced over 40 years of frontier life.

As earlier mentioned, he was living with Alice, an Anmatyerre woman (incorrectly stated as Warlpiri in the earlier article). Because of the laws of the era, she was ostensibly his housekeeper.

Randal always had fine horses, and can be expected to have been a competent shot with

his .22 rifle.

His best long-term mate, Fred Brooks, had recently been murdered. He believed that he, not Fred, had been the person they had wanted to kill, so blamed himself for the rest of his life that Fred had taken his place.

While his entire background and his call to the authorities for assistance indicates a man who had respect for the law, he also appears to have believed in "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."

He was not at all unusual in this respect in the era, and many people still think it a reasonable stance to take.

He undoubtedly had a basic comprehension of the Anmatyerre language, which combined with "bush English" allowed him to converse with and understand his wife and station hands.

Jack Saxby was a young bushman who had worked with Fred Brooks, and knew him well. He was a marksman, an absolutely superb rifle shot, according to Bryan Bowman. In 1925, when prospecting, he was attacked by a group of Aborigines; he stated that he had fired a dozen shots and "shot to kill." However this is viewed today, it would have been understood as one's only hope of survival by any of his bushman mates of the era. Presumably several warriors had died before the others fled, but no details are available. Quite clearly any deaths are to be regretted, but in a fight for one's life there isn't much likelihood of checking when "enough is enough".

Had there been an investigation at the time, it is fairly certain that Jack would have been exonerated because it would have been accepted that he shot in self-defence.

He was armed with a revolver and rifle, probably a Winchester repeating rifle, at the time of the patrol, and can be assumed to have had a very basic ability in local languages.

Billy Briscoe, who had been sent for by Randal Stafford, was a frontier cattleman who had known Fred Brooks well and had considered him "a thorough gentleman."

As with Randal Stafford, he lived with an Aboriginal woman. Again, as with any man living out west of the Alice at the time, he must have been tough of mind and body, competent at all bush skills, and a man who could live off the land with a rifle.

He contributed "six or seven horses" and was armed with a "revolver loaded in seven chambers" and had "thirty or forty cartridges" in his swag. (Such a supply of ammunition was presumably normal, and those with rifles as well as revolvers probably had the same minimal amount of rifle bullets).

He was possibly the same Billy Briscoe who Skipper Partridge described in 1917 as "little, white bearded, and with the clearest of blue eyes"; whose favourite sayings were "as the saying is" and "in a manner of speaking"; and who "disbelieves in holidays on the ground that they are a waste of time and money that in all probability will be needed to buy tea, flour, and sugar at a later date."

He almost certainly had a basic ability in the Anmatyerre language.

Alex Wilson, son of a former miner and an Aboriginal wife, was a Walmajirri man. He was the smallest man in the group, but at about 20 years of age was already a great survivor and, like the rest of them, a good horseman and as tough as nails. He was an extremely competent bushman, and was an excellent shot with the rifle he used on the patrol probably a .303 rifle.

In that he came from Halls Creek Alex was a trespasser in Warlpiri country, yet he had also worked with Warlpiri and was to marry Warlpiri women. John Cribbin ("The Killing

Times", 1984) gives an incorrect perception of his ability in languages: he had a good bush story-telling command of English, and spoke the south-western Halls Creek area language, Walmajirri, fluently. There is also no doubt that he already had a very good grasp of Anmatyerre and Warlpiri he became fluent in Warlpiri during the 1930s. In that his prior employer had been the recently deceased Joe Brown, he was now probably technically under the employ of George Murray before his return to employment by Nugget Morton.

At this stage Dodger, so recently one of Fred' Brooks' camel boys, was the final member of the patrol. He was Anmatyerre, probably a young man by Aboriginal law, and can be assumed to have been the horse-tailer (there were 14 horses) and general camp help for the patrol. He was armed with a revolver during the time that he was on the patrol, and spoke both of the local languages and bush English.

The laws of the land, as they then prevailed, meant that all of the Aborigines were strongly under the control of the white people who employed them. During a police patrol they were even more strictly controlled. They could not withdraw from the patrol without specific permission, so were "locked in" to following Constable Murray's orders, whether they wanted to or not.

One would assume that Murray would have got the additional civilian men of the patrol to swear an oath to uphold the law, but his lack of formal police training meant that he apparently failed to do this. Nonetheless he clearly repeated Cawood's orders, and was also supported by Randal Stafford in making it plain that no women or children were to be shot if it came to shooting while attempting arrests.

There seems little doubt, given the Tanami police experience, the threats that had been coming in about men wanting to spear Randal Stafford, and the actual murder of Fred Brooks, that a hard line was to be taken. The shooting of Woolingar while he was resisting arrest was later accepted as legally justified, but might also be suggestive of the approach that was about to be taken.

Before considering the accounts of the actual patrol, though, try to put yourself in Mounted Constable Murray's shoes. What would you have done?

You are a light-horse trained mounted policeman, having missed out on the last great cavalry charges in history.

Your government has totally let you down by not formally training you, however much you appreciate the freedoms this gives you. You are newly arrived on the last frontier in Australia, in command of Native Constables and excellent, tough but independent pastoralist horsemen, none of whom you really know. You are to attempt to arrest, without violence, armed warriors who, on all accounts, will spear you as soon as look at you.

And you do not know their language or customs. No-one expects you to go out with anything but a well-armed patrol. Everyone expects you to lead by example, and everyone also expects that you will "teach them a lesson."

I would like to think that I am a fair person, but had I been out on the frontier in 1928, known the circumstances and been called upon by George Murray to join the patrol, what would I have done? I suspect that I would have chosen my best two horses, checked that my revolver and rifle were in their normal well-maintained condition, and joined the patrol wearing a waist bullet-belt for my revolver and a bandolier for my rifle.

It is easy to forget that things are different now. Passing judgments on the past is mostly

done with hindsight, from a comfortable distance.

The following select and edited accounts of the police patrol's activities are based on the information given by the various witnesses at the later enquiry.

Mervyn Hartwig's excellent unpublished thesis is acknowledged, but has not been extensively drawn upon. Similarly T.G.H. Strehlow's unpublished references are acknowledged, but have only been drawn upon in a peripheral way. An interesting source is Violet Turner's "Good Fella Missus", about missionary Annie Lock's experiences at Harding Soak (east of Coniston, between Aileron and Teatree) and other localities in Central Australia, particularly in the period 1927-1929.

Bob Plasto's "The Killing Times" (Imago Productions, 1985) is the only television film of substance that has ever been made that deals specifically with the massacre; it is a priceless source of information.

Yarns I had with Alex Wilson, various Warlpiri and Anmatyerre people, and other people who heard stories from patrol members or Aborigines who had survived, complement and sometimes challenge the formal record. In respect for their own independent research, yet to be published, I have not used any new evidence that Justin O'Brien and James Warden have located, but I thank them for friendly yarns. Interested readers are referred to the Central Land Council's excellent little booklet, "Making Peace With The Past" (2003), if copies are still available.

On the 16th the patrol, taking the two prisoners with them as "volunteer" guides neck-chained, walking and with Tracker Major (also walking) in charge of them travelled 18 kilometres west, where they observed a camp of 20 to 30 Aborigines. Jack Saxby described the situation and his perceptions prior to this first encounter as follows:

"On the way out from the first camp we were warned by the natives with us [Padygar, Woolingar and Dodger] that the blacks were going to fight and were not afraid of police. "There was never any suggestion this was to be a reprisal party, on the other hand, we were warned not to shoot except in self-defence, by Constable Murray.

"You cannot arrest these bush blacks. All the deaths [which occurred] were the result of our party having to defend themselves.

"A spear is a very dangerous weapon in the hands of a bush black.

"I always carry a revolver on my tours [prospecting or station work] and consider it necessary. I have had occasion to shoot at blacks before this trouble. I have had to shoot to kill. This was not a party got up for the purpose of wiping out the blacks before the blacks would wipe out the settlers. We could have killed a hundred if our object was reprisal."

Old Warlpiri men, and an old woman from a neighbouring group, have supported Jack Saxby's perception of the warriors as "cheeky" a view initially stated by Michael Terry: "Cheeky, that sums them up."

Jack Saxby's comments are his honest assessment. It is improbable that he was alone in thinking like this.

On sighting the Aboriginal camp Constable Murray ordered, "No shooting allowed unless absolutely necessary.

"I want to take as many prisoners as I can. Do not interfere with women and children!"

He then arranged the patrol in a line that, in its progress, was meant to encircle the camp. However, after initially proceeding at a walk then canter, Murray rode ahead at such a pace that the others were left behind and the order of advance became haphazard. Randal

Stafford recalled:

"I heard the rattle of weapons such as boomerangs and spears. I heard Mr. Murray calling on them to stop, in English. I don't suppose the blacks understood but there was no other way of speaking to them [by Constable Murray]."

Billy Briscoe corroborated Randal Stafford's account, and gives greater detail:

"Constable Murray galloped ahead and jumped off his horse which took fright and galloped back to the packs. I saw Constable Murray try to arrest a native. There were mobs of blacks close handy. The native had a boomerang and shield in his hand and the other natives got their spears and rushed towards Constable Murray as if they were going to throw them. The lubras ran around with nulla nullas and yamsticks. I sang out loudly to the half-caste [Alex Wilson] to get in there and help Mr. Murray. I heard a noise in the scrub and went to investigate this and while I was doing so I heard four or five quick shots."

There were more shots than this. Murray, who had been rushed and was being struck by various weapons, drew his revolver and fired two shots. Jack Saxby "fired three shots at the leaders of the mob".

And, although he did not mention it at the enquiry, Randal Stafford later independently told a pastoralist and a store-keeper that, on seeing a slender naked youth fleeing, he fired three shots, all of which hit the youth in the back, the last one being fatal.

When he rode up to the youth he realised that he had been mistaken he had killed a young woman.

Much as he later talked about it in a hard-edged old bushman's way, at the time it shocked him that he had shot a woman. He had, however, avenged his old mate Fred's murder, so stated to Murray that he would no longer take part in the patrol.

The other shots had, so the enquiry was later told, resulted in the death of the man who had initially attacked Murray, two other men who had attacked him, one woman, and another woman who was severely wounded. Randal Stafford gave her a drink, and she died shortly afterwards.

Whether Murray was so inured to the realities of death as a result of his experiences in World War I, expressing the practicalities of the setting, or ruthless when he later said, "I don't think it matters where she died a minute or an hour afterwards", will depend on the individual reader's perception.

Tracker Major, so Randal Stafford later stated, had identified her as the woman who had held Fred Brooks' arms while the men attacked and killed him.

Alex Wilson was apparently not involved in any shooting, but had assisted Murray to escape his predicament.

Police Paddy was also not directly implicated at this time because his job was to gallop his horse towards anyone attempting to flee the Aboriginal camp; he twice turned back one man.

It appears that Murray probably shot the leading warrior, and possibly one woman; that Randal Stafford shot a young woman (mistakenly thinking that she was a young man), and that Jack Saxby probably shot the others.

Billy Briscoe, Randal Stafford and Jack Saxby all said that the shootings were unavoidable under the circumstances, and agreed with George Murray that his very life depended on him using his revolver.

The bodies of the deceased were buried and, as was normal practice in the era, and

occurred as late as the 1960s, all Aboriginal weapons in the camp were destroyed. As also might be expected, items which had belonged to Fred Brooks "a coat, shirt, singlet, quartpot, tomahawk, blanket, calico, butcher knife, tobacco wallet and about one pound of tobacco broken up into little pieces" were collected as material evidence.

NEXT: Spears vs rifles, the massacre continues.

Alice Springs News, Issue 1038 October 22, 2003.

WILSON WARNS: CHUCK HIM DOWN SPEAR! NO MORE YOU CAN BEAT HIM RIPULLA POINT 303! Part Seven of a feature by DICK KIMBER.

'Real True History': Coniston Massacre

The account in last week's issue of the first attack by Constable Murray's patrol on a group of 20 to 30 Aborigines seems straightforward enough, but it is worth considering from other perspectives.

I believe that the people of the Warlpiri camp, having observed the patrol approaching, had adopted submission-alert positions, recognising that they were facing a superior force.

One warrior stood with shield and boomerang in hand, making no attempt to throw the boomerang. Although one cannot at all prove it, this suggests that, as occurs when a superior Aboriginal force approaches another, the warrior was holding the boomerang in reverse to the throwing position. Only another Aboriginal man would be likely to notice this.

All of the other men, women and children were as Murray recounted "in a sitting or kneeling position". None were armed at the time, but weapons and digging sticks (yam-sticks) were close at hand, as was conventional in any camp. The possibility for a slow approach, using an interpreter, was there.

Mounted Constable Murray, new to this area, did not recognise anything unusual in the stance taken. His approach was as a cavalry charge from walk to canter to full gallop, yelling out arrest commands in English. Although he did not have a drawn weapon at the time, others in the party did.

His gallop to the edge of the camp, and immediate determination to arrest the standing warrior, meant that the Warlpiri group could only interpret the action and the approach of the other men in one way from their own world view: killing of the men was intended, and capture of the women and children when they were not also killed in the fighting. Their only options were to pick up their weapons to fight, and to flee for their lives. They attempted both.

In that Randal Stafford's evidence to the enquiry was that he did not shoot anyone, yet that in later private conversation he was clear in stating that he had shot one young woman, it is probable that six Anmatyerre and Warlpiri died, not five, on this occasion. The other quite remarkable aspect is that, apart from the warrior who resisted arrest being shot, and the shooting of the young woman by Randal Stafford, in the other entirely random shooting of warriors and one woman, all were identified as implicated in the killing of Fred Brooks.

And since Tracker Major had not been out in the Warlpiri country at the time of Fred Brooks' killing, his identification (according to Randal) of the now deceased woman as

the one who had held Brooks' hands was astounding, for that woman had fled with her husband "Bullfrog", and both escaped the massacre.

ENQUIRY There is little doubt in my mind that, at the time of the enquiry, all of the patrol members who gave evidence were sweating a bit, and justification of the shootings was at a premium. With Major fortunately not present, I have difficulty in believing that Randal did not stretch the truth.

The patrol continued from the 16th to the 18th August, 1928, with sometimes Dodger, sometimes short-term captured or "bailed up" women and children identifying the tracks of spearmen. The implication is that these men were involved in the attack on Fred Brooks (or perhaps in cattle-killing too), otherwise they would not have been of particular interest.

Their names, as given by Police Paddy but noted by an enquiry recorder without knowledge of the language, were Ungarra, Yarragula, Camalatjirburga, Canatjiburga, Latjigutjina, and Arkirkra. The ending tjiburga should probably be "tjugurba" (using the phonetics of the time), meaning "Dreaming".

It appears that, after the first encounter, the members of the patrol had a council of war. Randal Stafford, and probably Billy Briscoe and Jack Saxby too, must have made comment on the inability of any Warlpiri or Anmatyerre "bush blacks" to understand commands in English.

The first man shot had, after all, not been identified as associated with the murder of Fred Brooks, appears not to have understood English, made no attacking move, and yet Murray's actions had provoked understandable resistance that had resulted in the man's death.

From this point on, whenever the patrol worked as a group, Alex Wilson gave orders on behalf of Murray to the Warlpiri or Anmatyerre in their own language. This might well have given the impression to the Aboriginal people in the camps that Alex was as much responsible as Murray for what transpired, but in his own eyes he was giving everyone a better chance.

As he put it to me, his instructions in Warlpiri or Anmatyerre were "Put down your spears. You cannot beat a .303 rifle." or in a bush English version, "Chuck him down spear! No more you can beat him ripulla (rifle) .303!"

The trouble was that each warrior had sung his spears, some also applying special marks which meant that the spears would accurately track their targets and dig deep. Their spears were thus "loaded" in their perception and, though there is no evidence that they did so, the spearmen can be imagined as having countered with, "Chuck him down ripulla .303. No more you can beat him spear!"

Still, Alex genuinely did his best, as was several times attested to by other members of the patrol at the time of the later enquiry.

LIGHT HORSE Secondly, it must have been self-evident to George Murray, and also been mentioned by others (it is implicit in Saxby's comments, in particular), that while they were all competent horsemen, they had not had training in a Victorian Light Horse contingent. There wasn't much point in Murray heroically riding ahead of everyone else, thereby throwing the plan of advance into disarray. A smarter kind of approach was needed.

Thirdly, the nature of the terrain and the limitations of the patrol meant that it was best to be unencumbered with arrested or wounded Aborigines, or those required as witnesses.

(Randal Stafford was to initially solve this problem after the first encounter by shortly taking three Aborigines to Coniston).

Another point that can be made is that the burials were almost certainly as George Murray had all too often witnessed in World War I. Time and circumstances did not allow for formal deep burials. Instead, as the enquiry evidence indicates, the victims were at times buried two to a grave.

It is also almost certain that, though a shovel was carried on the patrol, the graves were very shallow. They were probably less than a metre in easily dug sandy or loamy soil, and possibly just with rocks piled on top of bodies on stony ground. In some instances the later evidence suggests that the patrol pressed on after some skirmishes, not burying the bodies at all.

Rather than give a day by day, incident by incident, account, select references are now considered.

"Police Paddy" appears to have been the most active tracker. At times he tracked on foot but, when the tracks were plain, as they were along a creek-line, walking pad or sand, he led the way on horseback.

No arrests were made between the 16th and 18th. Interestingly Michael Terry refers to a situation described by Randal Stafford that is not in any of the accounts (his own included) mentioned at the later enquiry.

"Forty miles west [of Coniston station] the party picked up more tracks. Some blacks were surrounded but they escaped, Stafford explained, admitting that he had fired to stop them, without result."

This, as the enquiry accounts reveal, was a common stance taken by Randal Stafford and Billy Briscoe. In explaining what they did, they omitted any detail of what the other members succeeded in doing. If the "blacks were surrounded", it is probable that Constable Murray executed his dismounting-to-arrest role; and probable that this action led to a fight.

It is also equally probable that, though Randal did not hit anyone, every Warlpiri adult male died as a result of more accurate shooting by the other members of the patrol. This occurred on every other occasion throughout the time of both major patrols when a group was surrounded.

My own supposition is that Randal must have been keeping quiet about the finer details. Michael Terry, who admired him, must have "gone along" with him. And yet, I have no proof of this.

Was Randal telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? It was an enquiry, not a trial, so a sin of omission would not have been as of great a concern as it would have been at a trial. Perhaps total success at shooting all of the males at a large camp meant that the tally was a bit too likely to upset the outside world.

How many might have been shot? In later evidence George Murray had no qualms about telling of eight being shot, and adding 14 to a list. After 75 years, though, as there are no bodies, there is no proof of my supposition.

Randal indicates, and other accounts corroborate, the few Warlpiri and Anmatyerre women and children, and one old man, who were captured, were allowed to go free. However, while Billy Briscoe was careful to indicate that he only heard "a rifle report in the hills" during another encounter, and Jack Saxby and Randal Stafford do not mention it at all, Police Paddy and George Murray provide three variant accounts in which they

alone were involved. It took place in hilly country near Cockatoo Spring, west of Brooks' Soak.

Two men were said to have been handcuffed, with one slipping the handcuffs in one account; both slipping the handcuffs in another; and no handcuffs being involved in the third. Whatever the confusions here, which were to cause a bit of concern to the enquiry (was Mounted Constable Murray actually shooting handcuffed Aborigines?), there were none about the end result.

George Murray was proud of his revolver shot at "at least 150 yards distant" which killed one man, and both agree that Police Paddy shot the other with a rifle. Having fired a colt .45 revolver and pistols in my youth (though only at tins at 25 yards), I understand George's pride in shooting a running target with a revolver at such a distance. However, I am not sure that that is what the enquiry wished to know.

No doubt they were relieved to learn that he had called out in English for the two men to stop and, when they did not heed this, he had fired two shots over their heads as warnings before he "dropped" his target and Police Paddy "dropped" his. Clearly they were resisting arrest!

At this stage the patrol returned to Coniston station. Randal Stafford, the two prisoners Padygar and Woolingar, and the boy witness Lala, all remained at the station. They were joined by a police tracker called Jack, who had been sent out to Coniston by Cawood, but who appears to have played no part in the actual patrol.

After a brief spell the patrol moved out. The records of the next fight all indicate that six aggressive spearmen were encountered at the Six Mile Soak on the Lander River, but the details vary.

NEXT: "You cannot arrest these bush blacks". This suggests the alternative, to shoot them all.

Alice Springs News, Issue 1039 October 29, 2003.

WOUNDS ARE AS FATAL AS BEING KILLED ON THE SPOT. Part Eight of a Feature by DICK KIMBER.

'Real true history': Coniston Massacre

After the police patrol's first encounter with a group of 20 to 30 Aborigines, in which at least five but more likely six died (see the last two issues), the known likely outcome was that more would be shot in future encounters.

As Jack Saxby was later to say, in supporting other patrol members, "You cannot arrest these bush blacks". This suggests the alternatives, to shoot them all or let them go. Jack gives a concise, substantially honest, account of the next meeting.

"We found them at Six Mile Soak and surrounded their camp. I was working at the back of the camp to see that none escaped. I could tell that the blacks were showing fight, by their talk and the rattle of their weapons.

"I could hear what I thought was Constable Murray telling them to put down their weapons. I heard several shots and made back to where the party was. The blacks saw me coming and threw a couple of spears at me.

"I jumped off my horse and fired four or five shots with my rifle. I do not know whether I hit them or not. I certainly tried.

"The blacks were rounded up and when I came up I saw three black men dead. There were also three wounded. We started these back to the river where the water was. Two were very badly wounded."

Billy Briscoe indicates that it was here that Alex Wilson was first used to call out he "yabbered" to them in their own language, telling them to put their spears and boomerangs down prior to the conflict, but to no avail.

And in Bob Plasto's Imago film of 1985, "The Killing Times", Alex Wilson, then the sole member of the patrol who was still alive, was quite clear who did the shooting Constable Murray, Jack Saxby and Billy Briscoe. This was a statement of fact, "real true history", as he commented to me.

Murray states that "a guard was placed over the camp that night", and Jack Saxby's account continues:

"When I got up the next morning, I saw the three prisoners. One was dead, another died a couple of hours afterwards. We took the third man with us. He was wounded in the flank. We went to Briscoe's camp and gave the black a drink of water, and he died shortly after."

What is not stated here, but which Alex Wilson told me, is that the reason for Jack Saxby "working at the back of the camp" was not only to prevent an escape, but also to catch the men in a crossfire. Being the marksman rifleman, the "main trigger man" among the white members of the patrol, as Bryan Bowman called him, this was always to be his position if at all possible.

And much as he states, "I did not know whether I hit them or not", the shots were probably at about 50 metre range. It is likely, from the accounts of the others who gave evidence, that he shot three, while Billy Briscoe shot one and George Murray accounted for the other two.

What is clear by this stage is that it was unwise to be wounded by the party, because wounds were always as fatal as being shot dead on the spot.

It is also interesting that Jack Saxby mentioned to Michael Terry that he "was at Tippenbah when out with Murray after Brooks's murderers". Tippenbah, which must have been one of Randal Stafford's place-names derived from his favourite poetry, is another place not discussed by any of the police party in detail to members of the enquiry. It is known as Patirlirri to the Anmatyerre and Warlpiri.

However much the enquiry did not hear about it, I suspect that this is where George Jangala's father and older brother were, as indicated at the commencement of this story, shot while he was spared.

George was too small to remember other than the shooting of his father and brother, the fear he felt at the trampling horses and sound of rifle fire, and himself and his mother crying. He believed that a "big mob" of others had been killed too.

This was independently confirmed by a Jampijinpa man who told Peter and Jay Read that Murray's patrol group had rounded them up, drafted the women and children from the men, then shot all of the men.

Senior women descendants from Willowra have explained that the shootings occurred during a time of ceremonies.

Jimmy Jungurrayi told me of all of the dead Anmatyere and Warlpiri, "Shoot Œem like bullock, Jakamarra." He reiterated this story to Peter Read, indicating that he had heard that many men were shot as with bullocks that are shot, without any particular feeling.

This does not sound all that much like an attempted arrest so much as a deliberate slaughter.

And since it slipped the memory of the members of the police party during the time of the enquiry, it is likely that the tally of deaths would have caused the enquiry members to blanch a bit.

According to Billy Briscoe the police party then spent "several days following the blacks to the West Australian border."

Billy's knowledge of the country west of Coniston must have been limited, for Warlpiri people have told me that the members of the patrol were obliged to turn back in the vicinity of present-day Yuendumu, because of lack of knowledge by patrol members of where the few drought-surviving waters were.

Jack Saxby confirms this in his account, for he says that the patrol travelled only a further "forty miles" west of Cockatoo Spring, itself the next main water west of Brook's Soak, while George Murray is even more specific in giving the distance as "about 36 miles". The patrol was nonetheless a good 50 kilometres beyond the westernmost waters of the cattle station country as it had been taken up in 1928.

The far west patrol is also interesting to examine. I believe that the following account is related to it.

When I first visited Yuendumu in 1970, Harry Nelson Tjakamara introduced me to a number of senior men who, as was the practice of the prior generations, had been given nick-names by early pastoralists or other bush workers. Harry's father "Hitler" Jupurrula was my first surprise, but then came "Mussolini" Japaljarri, "Creeping Charlie" Jungurrayi, "Pharlap" Japangati and "Jumbo".

"Creeping Charlie" was prevailed on by Harry to show me a scar in his leg.

It was a very neat round scar, marking where a rifle bullet had hit the outside of the thigh, and passed right through.

It had been a severe wound, which caused him to collapse, but he then rolled beneath some very dense spinifex near rocks.

The police patrol's horses thundered by in pursuit of other fleeing Warlpiri, then later the patrol members came back in search of bodies.

Alex Wilson told me that Mounted Constable Murray, having seen the Warlpiri man fall, sent Alex to the approximate area to search for the wounded or deceased man.

Alex had stood on the rocks above him, and could see the blood trickling out from beneath the spinifex tussocks. He felt sorry for the wounded warrior, and called out to Constable Murray, "Nothing here, boss!" Alex stated to me that he believed that, by this act, he had saved Creeping Charlie's life.

The patrol otherwise followed a similar pattern to the others, although it was not possible to make the same approach because the Warlpiri men were hiding in rock-shelters and among the boulders of a hill. Each patrol member told a very different story of the encounter.

Police Paddy claimed that, while he and Alex Wilson were working together, they saw a "big mob of blackfellows", with many women and children, and all of the men armed with boomerangs.

Alex warned Paddy to "sit down" to avoid the boomerangs, but then, said Police Paddy, "Yarragula threw a boomerang at Alex Wilson and just missed his hand." He doesn't say what Alex did at this stage, but Alex recounted to me how he had fired in self-defence at

one man. The strong possibility is that this was Yarragula.

Police Paddy's account continues, indicating that both he and Alex fired their weapons over the warriors' heads, then ran towards them and, using the handcuffs that Police Paddy had, arrested "Yarragula and Camalatjiburga and Canatjiburga."

Although he omits the detail, the latter two had almost certainly been shot and severely wounded by Police Paddy and Alex, for other patrol members refer to two severely wounded prisoners who, as Constable Murray reported, "died during our lunch hour".

(Meal-time breaks appear to have been particularly perilous for wounded prisoners).

Alex told me of shooting two men out of all who were shot throughout all of the patrols, one absolutely in self-defence and the other in general affray.

He perceived himself as caught up in something unavoidable, with Constable Murray very literally "calling the shots".

According to Police Paddy, Yarragula was still alive at this time and, when asked what was the matter with him, he replied, "EI got something no good inside' pointing to his belly". In the colloquialism of the day this would have been called "lead poisoning", but Police Paddy maintained the charade.

He later said that, when he asked what should happen to Yarragula, Constable Murray replied, "He is bit crook, leave him behind." He either died of his wounds shortly afterwards or was shot by a member of the patrol as a solution to a problem.

The latter may seem too callous a suggestion, but Bryan Bowman always referred to Police Paddy by the expression of the era as "the main trigger man" among the Aboriginal patrol members, and believed that no wounded man had any chance of survival if he was involved.

Constable Murray, too, only knew Military Law. At times of extreme situations, as George Witton explained in his 1907 "Scapegoats Of the Empire", this was simply translated as, "No quarters, no prisoners".

Constable Murray went close to supporting this perception when, during questioning at the enquiry, he said that he "shot to kill". Then, when asked, "You did not want to be bothered with wounded blackfellows?", responded, "Well, what could I do with wounded blackfellows?"

The other members of the patrol remained extraordinarily quiet about the western encounter when telling their versions. Billy Briscoe claimed that he only heard "the reports of one or two shots", and consistently stated that he did not shoot anyone.

This was not the perception of Warlpiri people in the 1970s. It is almost as difficult to accept as Jack Saxby's statement that, on seeing "some blacks in the hills" he called out to them, encouraging them to approach, and when they continued to dodge among the rocks he simply "fired a couple of shots ahead of them to try to bluff them". Jack is the man who stated that on another occasion he had "had to shoot to kill", that it was not possible to make arrests, and openly stated that he had shot people earlier in the patrol. George Murray was at least honest enough to say that, when attacked by two natives with yamsticks, he shot one of them dead. Still, there is no proof that Jack Saxby did other than what he said.

Partial clarification came when, in Darwin at the trial of the two arrested men, George Murray stated that there were six Warlpiri men in the group about the boulders and cliffs, one being an old blind man (who apparently was unharmed), four of whom were shot, and one of whom, Arkirkra, was arrested. Arkirkra probably did not realise that he was a

rarity he actually lived to tell a tale.

One other aspect about this western patrol is that no mention was made of burying the bodies. This is almost certainly because the bodies were now simply being left where they fell, or were being burnt. Any study of the enquiry records indicates that burials with a shovel occurred early in the patrol, but that burials are rarely mentioned thereafter. Although burning of bodies is only specifically mentioned in one oral history account of another patrol, it was not something that the later enquiry would have even remotely condoned. Mounted Constable Willshire had got away with it in 1890 because his Native Constables did the burning for him, and conflicting evidence was given at his trial, but there was considerable disquiet about it.

I assume that everyone on the patrol was sworn to secrecy. They were all going to be guilty of a crime, whether they had shot anyone or not, if it was revealed that the bodies had been burnt. No wonder my old friend and I did consider him an old friend Alex Wilson always referred to these times as "the bad old days".

The patrol returned to Coniston station in time to witness the death of Woolingar and bury him, then dispersed to their bush occupations. George Murray and the police trackers left Coniston on 31st August and arrived in Stuart Town on 1st September, 1928. On that day Murray's accounts of the patrol first became known to Sergeant Noblet (sometimes spelt Noblett) and the Government Resident, John Cawood. Shortly thereafter the townsfolk and Alice Springs Telegraph Station people learnt of the patrol, and through them quickly enough so did the cattle station people and others visiting town. However much an occasional shooting of an Aboriginal, or the bush death of anyone else by any means, was accepted as a normal state of affairs "God's will", if you like news of the death of a formally stated 17 Aborigines, and rumours of many more, must have caused concern and disquiet among at least a few of the local people who heard of the patrol's activities. There was a difference between surface acceptance, even acclaim, of "teach them a lesson" by some who heard the news, and what they actually thought. After all, however much the rest of the Australian population thought of Alice Springs / Stuart Town as a remote outpost, there had not been the equivalent of such shootings in most of southern and eastern Australia since the 1840s, and on most of the frontier since the 1860s to 1890s.

Even in the Centre things had been tolerably quiet since the time of Mounted Constables Willshire and Wurmbrandt in the 1880s, and the last major trial of a policeman for killing Aborigines had been Willshire's in 1890-1891. Thus in 1928 it wasn't exactly a "flash" start for the new "capital city" of the new "state" of Central Australia!

A special party had travelled up from Melbourne only a year before to assess the tourist potential, which was expected to increase once the train-line reached Stuart Town the next year. No-one had suggested that "shooting a blackfellow" was to be part of the experience.

Sergeant Noblet was one who seems to have been concerned. Despite all of his years of experience, or perhaps because of them, my impression is that he smelt the possibility of an enquiry coming on.

Perhaps a figure of 71 was mentioned, and the figure became transposed to 17 in George Murray's later recall. I have no proof of this, but Sergeant Noblet had not been appointed to the new "state" of Central Australia because he was a fool. He was a very experienced senior police officer, including time at the Arltunga police station east of Alice Springs

20 years earlier, yet he omitted to make any written records of his conversations with George Murray, and accepted brief outline reports which he had assisted Murray to compose.

While people in the same occupation often protect their own, self-preservation is a strong instinct in everyone. Sergeant Noblet appears to me to have managed both. He must have known that if the news spread beyond the Centre he was likely to be in trouble, though not as much trouble as the members of the patrol.

NEXT: What were the Anmatyerre and Warlpiri doing at this time?

Note: The description of Constable George Murray as a mass murderer in a picture caption last week was an editorial decision of the Alice Springs News. It was not the work of our guest writer, Dick Kimber.

Alice Springs News, Issue 1040 November 5, 2003.

"OLD MURRAY MOB SHOT THE WRONG MAN". Part Nine of a Feature by DICK KIMBER.

'Real true history': Coniston Massacre

According to the evidence presented to the enquiry, the women and children, and rare old men, who were allowed to go free, behaved as the patrol members instructed them to. Police Paddy tells how Constable Murray "told a black boy [an old man] and two gins to sit down there [at a soakage] and by and by go bush" just after two men had been shot; and how he told six other women, "Don't be frightened", immediately before three men were severely wounded in shooting.

Then, after he and Alex Wilson rounded up the surviving group of unarmed men, women and children, he "made them walk straight" to the police camp where he "did not know what became of them". Apparently realising the instant he said this that the enquiry members would have difficulty in believing this, he added, "I did not hear any shots fired".

(The unusually large numbers of occasions when momentary blindness, momentary deafness and permanent amnesia afflicted the patrol members is quite astounding.)

There is little evidence presented to the enquiry of anyone attempting to escape, and no sense of the women and children being upset at the deaths of husbands, fathers and, at least in one instance, wives and mothers. Blind Freddy would know that it was all a little bit different.

A brief account of what transpired is now given, but four points need to be made first. Since the 1970s there has been a tendency for both Warlpiri and Anmatyerre people to equate Jack Cusack, Alex Wilson's long-term "best mate" (as Alex always referred to him), with Jack Saxby. Jack Saxby (actual name John, but universally known as Jack) was a member of at least one of the police patrols of August-September, 1928. Jack Cusack was not.

Secondly, there are very few people left who are old enough to know at first hand anything which transpired. They sometimes give variant and conflicting accounts, even if certain limited details are constant. The focus has increasingly come to be on Fred Brooks and Bullfrog, and George Murray and Alex Wilson, whereas in the early 1970s

all members of the first patrol were likely to be mentioned. (The wider Australian society does the same. Who of us can name every member of Central Australian explorer Stuart's different exploration parties?)

Thirdly, although most very old people and their descendants have lived in and about the country traversed by their ancestors and the patrol, their knowledge is often of a similar nature to that of the wider Australian population who only have a handed-on oral history of their ancestors' participation in World War I.

However much their knowledge adds to the overall picture, errors of fact and perception occur, just as I am sure that there will be people who can point out errors (hopefully minor) in my account, no matter how much I have attempted to give a "real true history". And fourthly, some of the old Aborigines, as my late old friend Pastor Tom Fleming pointed out, "love the big numbers", such as occur in the Bible. (The jawbone of the ass that Sampson used to slay his enemies must have been mighty strong, and their thousands of heads mighty soft).

In one memorable case an old Aboriginal friend who told me aspects of the Coniston story also told me of an unrelated "big corroboree" at which a "thousand million men" participated. We all have a tendency to exaggerate!

Turning now to some of the experiences and responses of the Anmatyerre and Warlpiri to the patrol's activities, the four universals that I was told in the 1970s were that survivors fled, terrified, from the scenes of the shootings; that increasingly as the word spread about the killings people fled to places they hoped would be safe; that there was much wailing and mourning; and that there has always been a concern that, since the spirits of the deceased people could rarely be put to rest in traditional fashion, they at times cause descendants anxiety, or cause them to act in ways that are not in accord with traditional law.

Individual accounts, such as that of George Morton which commenced this series of articles, are now rare, and I do not know of anyone who, in 2003, can show the scar of a bullet-wound. Some people, though, can tell of an incident.

Michael Japananga, an Anmatyerre man, and his friends, kindly walked about the Brooks' Soak Moon Dreaming area with me. We discussed the probability of a few old gnarled red-gums having been young trees when Fred Brooks, Bullfrog Japanangka and others were camping near the soak in 1928.

We marvelled at the neat timber-work at the old well. We wondered whether Bullfrog had perhaps extracted "sugarbag" (native bees' honey) from an old axe-cut tree I found. We reflected on the use of old mill-stones for both preparation of ceremonial paint and seed-grinding.

And Michael pointed out a mount to the west, Mount Treachery, where his grandfather had been shot by "old Murray mob." It had been a long time ago, and he knew no other details. The patrol had, however, "shot the wrong man".

This led to an animated discussion about Bullfrog. He had hidden in a small cave a little further west from where Michael's grandfather had been shot. Everyone knew some element of that story. Rosie Nungurrayi, speaking with Petronella Vaarzon Morel (Warlpiri Women's Voices, 1995), explained that after Bullfrog had killed Fred Brooks:- "[The] old man ran up to the hills to hide. My grandfather was living in the hills, in a cave. That's what saved his life while the police were out looking for him. He stayed in the hills. They didn't find him because he was sitting in the cave."

Old Jack Ross explained that the "whole lot" of Bullfrog's family had fled with him. His wives survived, as did his little dog. Jeannie Herbert Nungurrayi and Teresa Ross Napurrula showed Central Land Council people where this little cave was. Here he had pulled a spinifex tussock to the cave entrance, and sung a powerful magic song. Michael Japanangka and his friends told me how this song made Constable Murray and other patrol members blind whenever they looked at Bullfrog, but left all else visible. Bullfrog had listened to the cave wall, and could hear the patrol members talking about him as they stood on the rocks above the cave. George Murray, Alex Wilson and Jack [Cusack] Saxby could not see him. They could not find him. And so Bullfrog and his family had survived.

After the killing of the Anmatyerre women as well as the men at the first major encounter, some people fled east. In but a few days they travelled 150 kilometres east to Harding's Spring. There the missionary Annie Lock, like Paddy Tucker and Alex Wilson when they learnt of Fred Brooks' murder, had been apprehensive about the likely outcome of the police patrol. She was too pious to have put it in Alex's words, that there would be "hell to pay", but she would have well understood what he meant. The Anmatyerre who arrived at her camp confirmed her worst fears:-

"[One] night, dark figures crept out of the bush shadows towards the missionary's tent, and some lubras stood before her, their eyes staring with horror and grief. 'Where are our girls?' they demanded in a hoarse whisper. There were four native girls asleep in the tent, and the missionary assured the lubras that they were all secure.

'What is the matter?' she asked.

And then, the night air was rent by shrieks of awful grief, as these women and others following them gave vent to their anguish of soul.

'Big mob men, women, children shot,' was all they could say, as they ran off to the creek where the other natives were camped.

Miss Lock followed, in time to hear them telling an old lubra that her two boys had been shot, with a 'big mob' of others. The mother jumped to her feet in frenzy, with a blood-curdling shriek. She seized a waddy and would have cut open her head with it had they not prevented her.

The whole camp wailed with her. The missionary tried to comfort them, even carrying food to them to divert their thoughts from their woe, but they went farther down the creek and wailed all through the night, cutting themselves with sharp stones and burning off their hair with fire sticks."

A "big mob" suggests more than the five admitted to the enquiry. And what of the children? There was the young woman who had been shot by Randal Stafford.

Perhaps she was a child.

And did the murderous one kill a child before, at a later time, another patrol member lifted the barrel of his rifle, thereby saving George Morton?

Bryan Bowman believed that Police Paddy was capable of anything. If murder of a child did occur, it was against Constable Murray's instructions, and he must have emphatically reiterated that it must not occur again.

However, it would also have been an incident about which the members of the later enquiry need not know. Must not know!

Far to the west, beyond where the patrol turned back, Jack Ross Tjakamarra, then about 12 years old, first learnt of the tragedies when he and his family, while camped at a water

near Pirdi-Pirdi (near Mount Davidson), saw a woman approaching. As "Making Peace With The Past" (CLC, 2003) records of Old Jack's memory, she was painting herself white as a sign of mourning:-

"She came with a fire. Napaltjarri came with a fire. She was painting herself white in sorrow and putting white ashes all over her body. She was crying. I asked her, 'Why are you crying?' Well she struck me again and then she said in handsign, I have no son. All the grandfathers (Jupurrulas) didn't know what was going on. They didn't know." The Napaltjarri woman struck Jack, I understand, because as with everyone else in the camp, he was not outwardly showing signs of mourning.

She used handsign because she could not speak the names of the dead. "I have no son" tells of the shooting of her own son who, as a result of her marriage to a man of Jack's Jakamarra sub-section, was of the Jupurrula sub-section, the same as Jack's father and father's brother ("the grandfathers") who were in the family camp near Pirdi-Pirdi. In the same booklet Jack also recounts to Teresa Ross Napurrula another story of survival by the magical means used by a man of his brother-in-law's sub-section.

"At Pilykirrpala, the white man came upon Yinirri's father (Japaljarri). He had one boomerang with him. They shot him, they shot him, they shot him. He was singing a spell on them and with that he was waving one boomerang. They were shooting until they ran out of bullets but none of the bullets could hit him."

In such magic the boomerang is held in the middle section, and the magical "waving" action is sharply side-to-side: it is a parrying-deflecting action.

The flight west continued for some. Michael Terry noted, when in the vicinity of Mounts Marjorie and Patricia:

"[The] country was extraordinarily quiet, apparently deserted. This, however, was a false impression, for those involved in the trouble on the Lander had fled away to the west: their tracks had been seen heading straight for this no man's land. No doubt after the recent scare they were lying low without tell-tale smokes to betray. And it would have been foolish to imagine we had not been seen or heard; more than likely Jacky had jumped to the conclusion ours was a police party and therefore to be avoided."

Just as Jack Ross had heard of the tragedies while in his home country, so others similarly heard of the shootings as the news continued to spread like wildfire. Most people had fallen back to their own last great waters, so that the news-carriers knew where to find the people, even if the patrol didn't.

Harry Nelson's grandfather Minyina Jakamarra and his brothers, and Minyina's son later known as Hitler Jupurrula, heard of them out at Inter-Amoru Rock-hole, far to the north-west. The present-day Marshall family's grandparents learnt of the killings while at Pikilyi Spring, also to the north-west.

Jimmy Jungurrayi and his parents heard of shootings while at Mission Creek, to the west, and returned south-west to their haven at Yaripilong. Dinny Japaltjarri was hunting almost due south with his father, between present-day Yuendumu and Yuelamu (Mount Allan), when they heard the news.

Nearly always it was about a "big mob". Often it involved some kinfolk.

And again the news came to Annie Lock, four days of hard "foot-walk" travel to the east:-

"Further details of the tragedy came to her ears, as other natives came in with the story of one surprise visit after another to native camps by the police, each time resulting in the

shooting and killing of natives. Some said there were eighty killed, others made the number less. At the official enquiry, some months later, the number given was seventeen, but seventy was the number generally believed in the bush."

NEXT: Attacks on Henry Tilmouth, Nugget Morton and a second police patrol.

Alice Springs News, Issue 1041 November 12, 2003.

"I SHOT THE ABORIGINAL WHO WAS STANDING OVER ME, IN THE HEAD. THE OTHERS WERE STILL BELTING ME." Part Ten of a Feature by DICK KIMBER.

'Real True History': The Coniston Massacre

The Attacks Attack on Henry Tilmouth and Nugget Morton, and the Second Police Patrol.

In contrast to the understandable fear of those in the direct line of travel by Constable Murray's police patrol, a small group further south acted in a strong or "cheeky" way, depending on one's perspective.

Henry Edward Tilmouth, part owner of Napperby station with his mate Turner, discovered that a plan to spear him had existed. He was camped on the Lander when, towards the end of August, as he told Michael Terry:-

"Amongst the rocks of a huge stony ridge hard by his bough shed blacks began to ill-treat a piccanniny, hoping that its cries would draw him out of camp. Several bucks with spears were secreted ready to murder him. But fortunately he had a very good and loyal boy who advised him of the plan.

Having failed in the ruse, another buck came up to camp, taunting him: 'This one black feller country; nothing want 'em white man, white feller shift, can't sit down longa black feller.'

He then ran away.

An hour or two later the same performance was repeated and again at sundown. Tilmouth fired at him without leaving his camp. Well it was that he did so, for next morning his boy showed him tracks where three bucks had been planted behind bushes in readiness to spear him directly he came into the open."

What he failed to mention was the possibility that, from a southern Warlpiri perspective, he thoroughly deserved to be speared. Dinny Japaltjarri showed me a site near Central Mt Wedge which told a tale. The overcast day and light drizzle of rain had triggered the story, and Bryan Bowman's knowledge of all of the station men involved has complemented Dinny's account.

Warlpiri families had travelled from west of Central Mount Wedge due south, then via the Haasts Bluff country to Glen Helen. The men had speared one of owner Fred Raggatt's draft horses, butchered it and taken the choicest parts. Fred came upon it shortly afterwards, and was savage.

He had been a teamster in his pioneering days in the Centre, and appreciated his big old draft horses far more than he appreciated most people. He, his only long-term mate George Tucker, Archie Giles of neighbouring Redbank station, and Tilmouth had followed their tracks.

The raid by the Ngaliya Warlpiri had been timed to coincide with a rainy spell, but the

rain had not been as heavy as anticipated. Instead of wiping out their tracks, it left them plain to follow.

How many people were there? Dinny did not know, but as he understood that there were three to five families, he and I determined that 10 to 15 was a likely number. As it was late afternoon and a cold, light drizzle of rain was falling, the families took their horse-meat and their fire-sticks into some rock-shelters, perched a little way up on a range section west of Central Mount Wedge.

Dinny believed that, as the station men approached, a draft of wind had caused the fire-sticks to flare, and given their hiding place away. The station men had taken up position among the boulders beneath the rock-shelters, from which there was no escape other than coming out into the open. Their rifles had poured the bullets in, and ricocheting bullets had been deadly.

After a time the shouts of the men, and the screams of the women and children, ceased. No-one ever came out of the rock-shelters alive, and Dinny's family never used them again.

Much the same was happening during the encounters on the police patrol, which George Murray and Jack Saxby later said was not a punitive patrol. (Everyone's definition varies.)

As the patrol's activities increased, those most traumatised by loss of family members sometimes travelled further than ever before. Despite the drought, new widows with children followed ancient "chains of connection", often to the north through country they knew men on horseback could not follow.

On a visit to Yuendumu in the late 1980s I met one woman whose mother had finally found sanctuary with the Gurindji at Wave Hill station. As Peter and Jay Read indicate in their fine 1991 publication, "Long Time, Olden Time", while Blind Alec Jupurrula's mother fled to what later became Mount Doreen station country, he fled with his aunty to Wave Hill.

Indeed, according to Alex Wilson, when he was shortly afterwards at Banka Banka on the way to Darwin, he heard that some "two hundred" Warlpiri people had fled to Wave Hill. This seems too high, but it was at Wave Hill, that the wonderful old character Engineer Jack Japaljarri, as he told the Reads, also instantly heard the news. As he put it five decades later, having had an understanding of World War II in between, it was as though "Aborigines and whitefeller bin startem war".

☺☺☺Late in August, 1928 an old Anmatyerre man visited Nugget Morton's camp on the Lander. He had almost certainly heard news of the police patrol's activities, but would have been careful in his approach to the camp in any case, so that he did not offend Nugget.

He saw that Nugget was carefully cleaning and oiling his rifle. Nugget was unusual among the Lander River country pastoralists in that he was quite fluent in the local languages.

William Brown Jampitjinpa continued this story while I was at Brooks Soak. Nugget Morton told the old man that he was getting his rifle ready to go out and shoot a "killer" (a beast to be used as meat). There was something about the way that Nugget said this that caused the old man to think otherwise. "He is not going for a killer. He is getting the rifle ready to shoot some blackfellows."

The old man travelled out west to a camp in which were a number of men, and they

planned to attack Nugget before he could start shooting. That this occurred is supported by subsequent events.

William John "Nugget" Morton was an immensely powerful man, yet also quick and light on his feet when he needed to be. Although he felt sure of his superiority over the local Anmatyere people, he and his partner in Broadmeadows station, a man called Sandford, had "received continual threats of violence" early in 1928.

According to Michael Terry, Nugget kept two savage dogs as added protection. Although Nugget asserts that all of the men involved in the attack on him were of the "Walmalla tribe", implying that they were from much further west, that he could also identify numbers of them suggests that several were local Anmatyerre men.

The group made a simple plan: they would poison the dogs, and attack Nugget as a group. After the dogs had been poisoned, and after an initial approach to his camp had made him wary, the attack took place. Much as one can question Nugget's assertion that all were Walmalla men, there is no reason to doubt his story of the attack, which now follows in slightly altered order of detail.

"After sunrise the next morning [28th August] I was having breakfast when three natives walked to my fire. I knew them, some by name. I told them to go back and sit down. Immediately one blackfellow walked to my fire again and said he was hungry and wanted beef. He spoke in his own lingo which I can speak and understand.

"Without looking up I handed him a piece of beef from the dish. He immediately seized my wrist my right wrist, swung behind me and caught the other arm behind me. The other two were on me in an instant. While endeavouring to throw them off I saw a mob of blacks rush out of the titree in front of me.

"The only thing I could do was make for the revolver that was in my swag. The three who were holding me hit me with their closed fists, anywhere they could get a hit on me. On gaining my revolver I was belted over the head with a nulla nulla.

"I don't remember how many hits I got, but I got more than one. The hits on the head put me in a very dazed condition. One big Aboriginal was standing over me with a nulla nulla going to bash me over the head. I was then standing up wrestling with the other fellow who had hold of me. I shot the Aboriginal who was standing over me, in the head. The others were still belting me. "[I] got hit also with a boomerang on the chin, face and head. I also got my thumb broken by a boomerang when I was getting hold of a revolver. "I held my left arm up to save my head and was just about all in when they left.

"After I tied up the cuts on my head from which I was losing a lot of blood and suffering great pain Š I got my horses and made my way back to my main camp which I reached in a very weak state from bruises and loss of blood."

As Michael Terry indicates, it was his partner Sandford "who got him to the overland telegraph line, where an A.I.M. [Australian Inland Mission] sister, by the greatest good fortune motoring by, dressed his wounds".

Bill Heffernan of Ti-tree shaved his head, and he and the nursing sister spent some time getting the splinters of boomerang out of his scalp before applying the dressings.

Warlpiri men remained amazed at Nugget's immense strength when they talked to me of this incident in the 1970s. They laughed, appreciated how tough he had been, and also laughed at the idea of the Warlpiri getting in so close in so many numbers that they hampered one another in their attack. He was likened to the then very popular comic-book hero, "The Phantom."

Nugget stated that "about fifteen" men had attacked him, and the Warlpiri men agreed with this number. They had heard that he hurled men from him in his struggle to reach his revolver.

After shaking himself free like an angry bull, he had swung his arms like flailing fence-posts. Some of the Warlpiri had been thrown three to four metres away.

It was a great story, and none of them blamed him for having shot the main attacker, Walgardu.

While all of this was going on, John Cawood received other news.

The prospectors Young and Carter, who had met Fred Brooks a few days before his murder, had reported the news of threatening Warlpiri to Sergeant Noblett, who had reported it to Cawood. Michael Terry had told of seeing Walmulla warriors in war-paint; shootings at marauders (without effect) by Randal Stafford and Jack Saxby on the 31st August; and passed on a further appeal from Randal Stafford for urgent assistance in dealing with those who were causing the depredations.

If this wasn't enough, the troubles at Pine Hill had not yet been dealt with. Constable Murray hardly had time to hand over the prisoners Padygar and Arkirkra and the witness Lala in Stuart Town before John Cawood approved his second patrol.

Although no clear and certain details survive of this patrol, it is probable that Murray again took Police Paddy and Major, added a station volunteer or two from Pine Hill to his number and also obtained horses there, then travelled north along the Hanson.

After that he probably returned by a circuitous route to Pine Hill before continuing to Coniston station in the police motor vehicle.

There he would again have had the assistance of Randal Stafford, Jack Saxby, Alex Wilson and, because of the need for horses, Billy Briscoe.

On the basis of all other surviving accounts of what transpired, there can be little doubt that at least one sizeable group was met, which one can reasonably predict would have meant that the majority of men were shot.

However Mervyn Hartwig, who thoroughly researched the events in the late 1950s, was only able to determine that the patrol took place from the 4th-13th September.

Accounts recorded since that time, in particular those recorded during Land Rights hearings in the late 1970s-1980s; several filmed in Bob Plasto's 1985 film, "The Killing Times"; some recorded by Grace and Harold Koch in their 1993 book "Kaytetye Country"; and yet others recently recorded by Central Land Council staff, include some (excluding Tippenbah) which I believe relate to this patrol.

Oral histories, which can only be approximations in time, indicate that, as might be expected, the patrol travelled north along the Hanson River from Pine Hill, having three encounters; from Coniston travelled north along the Lander River country where two more encounters took place; then followed down the Lander and had two more encounters in the general Coniston area.

If this is so, it is difficult not to envisage the death-rate substantially increasing. Grace and Harold Koch were told of particular episodes near Baxter's Bore on the Hanson which tell of the shooting of three men and the burning of their bodies, and the arrest and neck-chaining of two men.

Women and children who were in the camp were spared, and a few who fled and other people who were out hunting also avoided the shootings.

On the basis of two deaths every other encounter, which is the lowest number of deaths at

all other encounters, 12 more men are likely to have been shot. Many more are, in fact, likely to have died, but there is absolutely no written account from 1928 to indicate that any at all were shot.

The only further formally recorded evidence, which supports the oral histories, is that two more prisoners were brought in to Alice Springs. Since they were not later tried for Fred Brooks' murder, their charges probably related to cattle killing. They must have been tried in the local Alice Springs court by one of the two local Alice Springs magistrates and given local hard labour.

There is no doubt, from the Koch accounts, that despite the severity of the drought, people fled in all directions again.

As Mervyn Hartwig recorded, during the time of this patrol Government Resident Cawood telegraphed the Department of Home and Territories on the 4th September to let the authorities know that 17 Aborigines had been shot during the first Murray patrol, and requested that more police be sent up to the Centre.

When he received news of the attack on Nugget Morton, apparently on the 8th, he must have discussed matters with Sergeant Noblett. It seems that they decided to await the outcome of George Murray's second patrol, knowing that he was almost certainly going to be travelling in the general area of Nugget's Broadmeadows station, before instigating any other action.

In addition to this they were saved having to act on the 10th when Henry Tilmouth of Napperby sooled his dog onto "two niggers" who came up to his camp late in the evening, and when they started to "bolt" he "fired a shot to frighten them", then sooled his dog "onto them again".

By now, though, a Central Australian citizen or visitor, whose name is not known, had travelled to Adelaide, and on the 11th September the first news of the first patrol was in a major newspaper.

John Cawood no doubt realised that George Murray and his trackers needed a spell after their latest patrol, and they returned to Barrow Creek on the 16th September. On this same day Henry Tilmouth again solved the problem of an attack on him in frontier style. As he recounted:

"On 16th September one nigger sneaked up near my bed at the well and my nigger ran up and told me the blacks were sneaking up. I walked out about 25 yards and fired one shot. The nigger did not move and I started to walk towards him. The dog also went after him. He ran a little way and I tried to load the rifle but the bullet jammed in the bridge.

"I took about ten minutes to get the bullet out: I could see the nigger coming up on the other side. I called on him to stop. As soon as I spoke he raised the boomerang to throw it. I had the rifle to my shoulder. I fired at him.

"The bullet entered his body over the heart. I had no further trouble with the blacks."

NEXT: Encounters on the third patrol.

Alice Springs News, Issue 1042 November 19, 2003.

"DID THEY SHOOT IN SELF-DEFENCE?" "NO! THEY SHOT 'EM LIKE A DOG." Part Eleven of a Feature by DICK KIMBER.

'Real True History': The Coniston Massacre
Encounters on the Third Patrol

Last week's article finished with an account by Henry Tilmouth, part-owner of Napperby Station, solving the problem of an attack on him, frontier style. A plainer statement "The bullet entered his body over the heart. I had no further trouble with the blacks" would be difficult to find.

However, since the man killed, Wangaridge, was not supported by any other warriors there must be doubt about Henry's initial perception of "blacks Š sneaking up."

And what the dog and the boomerang thrower, only "a little way" away, were doing for 10 minutes, while Henry was getting out a bullet jammed in the bridge of his rifle, is a bit of a puzzle. It was extraordinarily good fortune for Henry that Wangaridge, who must have been no more than 50 metres away, waited (?) for 10 minutes until Henry had cleared the rifle and had it at his shoulder before, apparently unimpeded by the dog, he again approached.

Meanwhile, the second patrol was over and there had been an attack on Nugget Morton (also the subject of last week's article). It may be that news of the second patrol had Government Resident John Cawood and Sergeant Noblett a bit worried, and wishing that someone other than George Murray was available for the patrol that was required to now arrest Nugget Morton's attackers. Indeed it remains a puzzle why Sergeant Noblett was always required in Stuart Town.

However, he undoubtedly had to determine priorities, and the demands for assistance in the Glen Helen area meant that other Mounted Police were needed in that area too.

Whatever the reasons, the delay was brief, and on the 19th September George Murray was again back in Alice Springs, preparing for another patrol.

It is difficult to conclude other than that John Cawood approved of the "teach them a lesson" approach. There is also circumstantial evidence that he did not yet know of the newspaper report and thought that the news could be kept fairly quiet. He probably thought that Murray would be taking two adult Native Constable black-trackers with him, and must have accepted that he would recruit station men to the patrol.

Murray, no doubt now beginning to feel a bit like a yo-yo, arrived at Nugget Morton's Broad-meadows station on the 24th September. Nugget had recovered from his wounds, but the scars were still as visible as was his determination to do something about who had caused them.

Leading this third major patrol, George Murray was now experienced in the general nature of the country and knew something of the Anmatyerre and Warlpiri people. He also knew that his attempted arrests always resulted in resistance and attacks, which in turn resulted in the shooting of all males in any camp.

In saying this, though, it is easy to forget that, whatever actually transpired on the patrols as against what was sometimes reported, George obviously had to be a very competent and courageous bush policeman, and an expert horseman, to be travelling the desert distances he was.

Death by spear or by perishing were always genuine possibilities. He might have put his soul to one side, but even in his generation he must have been exceptionally tough of body and mind.

"Nugget" Morton was a very tough pastoralist who had been in the Lander River country for about four years, had overlanded stock across the Tanami Desert, and was known to be ruthless in his dealings with Anmatyerre and Warlpiri who challenged him in any way. He was undoubtedly a good bushman, and a good rifleman.

Alex Wilson, who after Joe Brown's death had been obliged to return to Nugget to work, had no love for him, but had no way of avoiding the situation in which he now found himself. Whether he liked it or not, George Murray wanted him for the patrol.

He was a man on the spot who could make up the numbers, he knew how Murray operated and, since Nugget was required to take over Jack Saxby's "crossfire" role, Alex was also useful in an overall support rifleman role.

I envisage that, in addition to this role, he replaced Major as the man in charge of the horses while travelling, and Police Paddy as the "sweeper" who had to head off anyone of a group who was trying to flee.

Why there were no formally employed police trackers is a puzzle, even if Police Paddy and Major were not available (as seems to have been the case). Instead a local boy, whose name is unknown, became the fourth member of the patrol.

He was probably a Kaytetye or Anmatyerre lad, about 12-14 years old, and presumably acted as horse-tailer for the "plant of about fourteen horses" supplied by Nugget, and as general rouseabout while in camp.

It is clear that George Murray believed that just three armed men, all with rifles and revolvers, were sufficient for the patrol that lay ahead of him.

This was a potentially dangerous assumption, and must have been made on the basis that, because of the drought, the local people were in small scattered groups, no more than 30 in number.

There is something that also suggests a death or glory approach by George Murray. Tennyson's "The Charge Of The Heavy Brigade At Balaclava", with its later echo of George's mates at the Charge of the Light Horse at Beersheba, captures something of how I think he perceived himself.

The "gallant three hundred, the Heavy Brigade", charged galloping into the enemy's ranks, and: "Fell like a cannonshot,/Burst like a thunderbolt,/Crash'd like a hurricane,/Broke thro' the mass from below,/Drove thro' the midst of the foe,/Plunged up and down, to and fro,/Rode flashing blow upon blow,/Brave Inniskillens and Greys/Whirling their sabres in circles of light!"

George didn't have a sabre, and he doesn't seem to have been so poetic. He was a soldier-policeman, a hard man doing a hard task in hard country. And the Anmatyerre and Warlpiri people were honed lean and hard by their land, too.

I remember once being out with an old desert man in a drought and, when I looked out over the heat-haze shimmering land and remarked, "Hard old men in the early days!", he added, "Hard old women, too!"

It was probably on the 25th or 26th of September that the patrol moved out from Nugget's station. They captured three innocent young men initiates early in the patrol, but they would not betray their kinsmen and elders.

They "humbugged" Murray for three days, leading him to dry soakages and abandoned camps.

Then, when he realised what they were doing, they used the cover of darkness to burn their feet at the fire until they blistered, and pound their toes so that they could not walk the next day or so they thought.

Constable Murray wrapped hessian bags about their feet and forced them on. And when they still "humbugged", he took one aside, out of sight of the others, fired two shots into the dust, and ... They obviously took this as a very real threat, and fearfully led the patrol

towards a waterhole.

Although there is no doubt about this account George Murray gave the same information in two interviews 27 years apart neither he nor Nugget Morton thought to mention the use of the three initiates as guides, or any other details associated with them, at the time of the enquiry.

George Murray's and Nugget Morton's accounts to the enquiry of what happened on the rest of the patrol contain enough words and phrases of identical or near-identical nature to suggest that they had rehearsed them together. I suspect that most people would have done the same under similar circumstances.

George Murray begins the further account:

"On nearing a place called Tomahawk Waterhole I instructed Wilson and the small black boy to keep the pack horses well behind. Morton rode down the bed of the creek and I rode about 100 yards in the scrub. I came across seven male adult natives, I galloped around and they assembled in one heap. I dismounted and the natives immediately attacked. I called to Morton, at the same time firing several shots wide of the natives. The position appeared serious and I fired to stop the natives. The shots attracted Morton and he was immediately on the scene."

As George is a bit light-on for details at this point, Nugget now takes up the story.

"The four armed blacks were belting Constable Murray who was on foot. I dismounted and drew my revolver as I ran. I fired several shots at the natives. I also heard Constable Murray fire several shots. The four natives were killed. I recognised them as being four of the natives who attacked me."

It was unfair of me to wonder whether the seven men had "assembled in a heap", a rather odd expression, before or after the shooting. Perhaps the four who were shot were "assembled in a heap". And perhaps the three young initiates who had initially misled Constable Murray joined them, for they are not mentioned from this time onwards.

Further to this, no-one is reported as being buried on this patrol.

The surviving three unarmed men gave satisfactory accounts of their movements, and helpfully "stated that the four dead had only arrived there some few days before and that they were the cheeky ones who had tried to kill Morton".

An interesting point is that this was probably the tenth time Murray had dismounted and been attacked. It is fair to assume that he been waddied, boomeranged and yam-sticked (if not also knifed, speared and tomahawked) innumerable times.

The total combination of blows must have been more than the blows Nugget Morton had endured in the 15-man attack on him. And yet there is no evidence that he needed the slightest bit of medical attention or bandaging. This is truly remarkable. His luck held in the next attack too.

The patrol travelled via Boomerang Waterhole on the Lander to Circle Well, away to the north-east. Here eight men were "rounded up" and, when Nugget spoke to them in their own language, telling them to throw their weapons down, all but two did so. These two, though they had "been casually employed" by Nugget, had also been two who had held his arms when he was attacked. When, despite several exhortations to throw down their weapons, they continued to hold them, Constable Murray dismounted. On the basis of all of his other accounts the result was predictable.

"Immediately I stepped to the ground the two of them jumped on top of me. I threw them aside and got possession of a tomahawk from one of them. He then attacked me with his

boomerang and I used the tomahawk to defend myself. The second blow struck him on the back of the head and he fell dead. The second native was in the act of driving a spear through me from about two yards distance. I drew my revolver and both Morton and I fired in the same instant and the native was killed."

A question might have been asked by a member of the enquiry team had anyone thought about his account. How was it that, if the native was attacking you with a boomerang, and therefore facing you, you managed to hit him in the back of the head with the tomahawk? No doubt a reasonable explanation could have been given.

The other six men, who must have been Anmatyerre because Nugget could "fluently" speak their language, told Nugget and Constable Murray that their main group was camped well to the east, and the patrol rode on. Fifty kilometres later they came to "a soakage at the lower end of the Hanson River" at which was a camp of about 40 people, nine of them men. As Nugget recounts, much the same procedure was followed as in earlier situations.

"We rounded this mob up. There was only myself and Constable Murray there because Wilson was with the pack horses. The natives were all armed with weapons. I spoke to them in their own lingo.

"Most of the nine were amongst the Aboriginals who attacked me. I told them to drop their weapons and be quiet. The blackfellows yabbered to the lubras to run away quick because they were going to kill us. Some of the natives put their boomerangs down and others put their spears up against the little bushes. Some refused point blank to put down their arms. We tried to get them away from their weapons but they kept circling back to them.

"Constable Murray dismounted and his horse again galloped back to the packs. Immediately the blacks attacked him with their boomerangs, sticks and spears. I saw Murray and a native both wrestling for one spear. The natives were right up against Murray then and I saw him drive the spear into the black. He then jumped back, drew his revolver and fired at the other blacks close handy. He sang out to me, 'Shoot quick or they will get me.'

"I jumped off my horse and went to Constable Murray's assistance with my revolver in my hand."

And as Constable Murray concludes:

"Even after several shots were fired it did not steady them. When order was restored it was found there were eight killed."

The ninth, I suspect, was severely wounded, and therefore not worth mentioning. I envisage him dying of his wounds, as all others who were wounded did, during a lunch-break or overnight camp.

Several further points can be made about the patrol and this incident.

First and most obvious is that most Australians in the year 2003 would probably call this incident a tragedy. However, in 1970 when I talked with old retrobate Nugget Hunter, a bush worker of the era, about the Coniston massacre, he simply exclaimed, "Teach them a lesson! Do them good!" Other evidence suggests that he represented what the majority of Central Australian bush workers thought in 1928. Secondly, when Nugget Morton, who spoke the local language "fluently", heard the mostly unarmed men say to their wives that they believed that they were going to be shot, why didn't he reassure them that this was not intended at all?

Thirdly, since at least half of the men of the group were unarmed, it is rather unfortunate that all of them were killed too!

Perhaps Alex Wilson's response to Bob Plasto's question, which is a general one about the numerous encounters in the overall Pine Hill to Coniston area, is the reality.

"Did they shoot in self-defence?" Bob asked. "No! They shot 'em like a dog," Alex responded.

Fourthly, as with all other clashes on this patrol, there is not the slightest suggestion that any of the men who had been killed were buried.

One other aspect of interest is that both Constable Murray and Nugget Morton state that Alex Wilson was not involved in any of the shooting throughout this patrol. They took it entirely upon themselves to deliver the justice they saw fit.

It seems to have been stretching the rule of law quite a bit. And yet it is worth pondering again, "What would I have done had I been a member of that patrol back in 1928?" Not all of us would have been minding the horses.

As they returned to Broadmeadows station in mid-October after three weeks of hard travel (according to Constable Murray they had been living on bush tucker for part of the time), it is likely that George and Nugget made a body count. Much as it is likely to have been an under-estimation, 14 is what they would have tallied. They could have added one more for the man Nugget had shot during the initial attack on him.

Meanwhile, out in the Glen Helen country, and in contrast to the earlier independent actions by owner Fred Raggatt and his private punitive party of Tucker, Giles and Tilmouth out near Central Mount Wedge, a police patrol had had success in a very different way. There, over much the same time as the Murray patrol, the police party had arrested 20 people.

As an indication of how the drought was having an impact rather than there being a propensity for such acts, 12 had been arrested for breaking into the Glen Helen station store; three for cattle killing on Glen Helen; and five for killing working camels on Redbank station. (Redbank was owned by Archie Giles and, at that time, was the western-most property on the north side of the MacDonnell Ranges).

These prisoners were lodged in the Alice Springs gaol which must have been at bursting point on the 18th October.

On the very same day, while John Cawood and Sergeant Noblett were probably still drinking whisky to the success of this patrol (the amount of whisky bottles consumed was a criticism of the administration in later years), Mounted Constable Murray arrived back in town. They must have almost choked on their whisky when they heard his news.

While it is entirely true that Constable Murray had only a brief time to fill out a report about the patrol, as he had to start for Darwin on the 19th to attend the trial of Padygar and Arkirkra for the murder of Fred Brooks, Sergeant Noblett must have been on "red alert" by this time. With his encouragement the report was very brief, so brief in fact that it omitted to mention, or even vaguely suggest, that at the very least 14 men had been shot.

NEXT: The trial of Padygar and Arkirkra.

Alice Springs News, Issue 1043 November 26, 2003.

LITTLE GIRLS CAPTURED: "DON'T LET US GO. HE WILL SHOOT US AS HE DID THE OTHERS." Part Twelve of a Feature by DICK

KIMBER.

'Real True History': The Coniston Massacre

The Trial of Padygar and Arkirkra.

Part 12 of an historical perspective by DICK KIMBER

Miss Annie Lock, the missionary who had set up camp at Harding Spring well, became a significant character in the overall history of the times once she knew about the impending trial of the two men accused of Fred Brooks' murder. By this time, the well having given out, 24 of the 26 Aborigines had been forced to leave, going to the more reliable nearby Woodforde Well and soakages, and to Ti Tree.

Miss Lock arranged to travel up to Darwin, taking with her two small girls whom she had named Betsy and Dolly. One had had yaws, but her health had vastly improved after 20 months of care. However, by taking the girls Miss Lock had unwittingly broken two laws that then existed.

First, she should have sought formal approval for their removal from Harding's Spring camp from the local area Protector of Aborigines. This protector was none other than Constable George Murray at Barrow Creek.

It was just that he had not been wearing his protector's hat all that often for the previous three months.

And secondly, because the original Northern Territory had, the previous year, become two odd formal identities, Central Australia and the Northern Territory, she was breaking the law by taking them from one "state" to another without permission.

In Katherine she stayed and met with other devout Christians who were aware of the pending trial of the two alleged murderers in Darwin.

When they heard the stories she had to tell that had been coming in to her from the bush, they asked the question, "And isn't anybody going to be charged with the murder of the natives afterwards?"

It seemed a fair question, and one which I believe Sergeant Noblett might well have had in mind when he assisted George Murray with his final report.

RESPONSIBLE However much he was helping Murray to save his neck, as senior sergeant who had approved the patrols Sergeant Noblett was doubtless also aware that he might be drawn in as legally responsible too.

Doctor Johnson's quip about how a hanging focussed a man's mind most wonderfully well might have been playing on his mind a bit.

The trial itself was relatively brief. On 7th November, 1928, precisely three months after Fred Brooks had been murdered, the court in Darwin was convened. Padygar and Arkirkra were charged with his murder, and George Murray presented his evidence.

To do so he summarised the entirety of the first patrol, for Padygar had been arrested at its start and Arkirkra at its finish.

The problem with the case was, however, that no-one who was a reliable witness other than Bruce Chapman had seen the body of Fred Brooks, and Bruce had himself been buried for two months!

Annie Lock's own summarised version of the end of the trial, from the time when Constable Murray had concluded his evidence by telling of the shooting of the last four men, now follows.

SHOT TO KILL "The court asked the witness [Constable Murray] if he shot at their legs,

and he replied that he had not done so.

"He shot to kill every time.

If he had shot to hit in the leg, what was he to do with a wounded blackfellow out there in the bush? In one instance a bullet killed a man, passed through him and killed another behind him. Here the judge remarked, 'Mowed them down wholesale'.

"After a retirement of fifteen minutes, the jury returned with a verdict of 'Not Guilty.' Padygar and [Arkirkra] then were acclaimed innocent of the murder."

It was an intriguing trial, with Constable Murray giving minor details of the shootings not elsewhere mentioned, and Annie Lock perceiving that the decision automatically meant that the other 17 who had been admitted as shot must also all have been innocent!

CITY PEOPLE The local Darwin correspondent for the Adelaide media (then primarily newspapers) summarised how city people, far removed from central Australia, were beginning to feel.

"Press, pulpit, and the general public unanimously agree with the jury's verdict in the aboriginal trial, and are shocked by the candid admissions of the police that they shot to kill natives who showed fight when overtaken.

"Some of them were shot eighty miles from the scene of the murder, and all of them were miserable, half-starved wretches.

"They were driven out by drought, and hunted way from waterholes by pastoralists. The natives are wandering the wilderness in starvation and despair."

His source of information for other than the trial details was the missionary, Miss Annie Lock.

No doubt George Murray and quite a few Central Australians were angry at the verdict, but to do anything directly to Padygar and Arkirkra was clearly "not on".

Murray was meant to escort them safely back to Barrow Creek, but by accident or design they escaped/were set free at Mataranka. Perhaps a walk of several hundred kilometres through hostile territory might manage what a jury could not.

Prior to this, though, there is little doubt that Murray, having failed to get a conviction when it most counted, decided to legally strike out at an irritant.

Miss Lock was his target, a missionary who had previously criticised him to his face about his care of bush Aborigines who were suffering ill-health, whom he probably knew had been suggesting that scores of deaths had occurred during his patrols, and who was now pointing out details that the newspaper correspondent might have overlooked.

He arrived at the compound where the girls were being cared for earlier than did Miss Lock, and they were in an army truck ready for him to take them away when she located them.

CRY They jumped down and cried, "No, no, don't let us go. He will shoot us as he did the others."

She then took them to the railway station, where a considerable crowd was on hand, as was normal when a train was about to depart.

Constable Murray was one of them, and the local newspaper correspondent had his next story presented on a platter for him:-

"It appears that Sister Lock concluded her battle for the custody of black and half-caste girls in a dramatic manner.

The Barrow Creek Constable demanded the girls. 'Take them,' said the courageous woman, 'but take them from my arms.' The constable pointed out that it was his duty.

STARVING

'Duty,' exclaimed Sister Lock. 'I did your duty for you.'

'I rescued a starving, motherless babe, suffering from yaws and sores even to her very mouth, right under your nose at Ti-Tree Well, as you know.'

'I fed her and cured her during twenty months at my own expense. I brought her here for final injections. Take her. Take her, but take her from my arms.'

As the journalist further noted, a "sympathetic crowd gathered round the brave woman" and, while George Murray was still intent on his role, a local Darwin policeman "referred to the fair-sized crowd and the public opinion".

For the moment common-sense prevailed, and Annie Lock was able to keep and care for the children.

However, Murray was on firmer ground back in the Centre, whereas it began to slip away from Miss Lock.

When the superintendent at Hermannsburg commented, without any foundation whatsoever, that he supposed that Miss Lock would be happy to marry an Aboriginal, this became vicious slander against her (indicating the prejudices of the era, and that lasted for decades afterwards).

HOOTED

A southern press journalist seized on this, Annie Lock was "hooted as she walked down the street" in Stuart Town two months later, and was so shockingly reviled by the white men of the town that she had to seek police protection.

Murray, meanwhile, prepared his case against her, and was ultimately successful in having her prosecuted, the "half-caste" girl put into the Jay Creek "Bungalow" school west of Stuart Town, and the other little girl returned to a "tribal" group.

NEXT: The appointment of a board of enquiry.

Alice Springs News, Issue 1044 December 3, 2003.

"WAS EVER A BATTLE FOUGHT IN WHICH 17 WERE HIT AND ALL DIED?" The Coniston Massacre. Part Thirteen of a Feature by DICK KIMBER.

'Real True History': Coniston Massacre The 1929 Enquiry

Part 13 of an historical perspective

by DICK KIMBER

The drought continued while agitation for an enquiry built like a tidal wave.

A key figure in raising awareness of the events was the Methodist lay missionary, Athol McGregor of Katherine, whose parish was the entire Territory. He had made his first journey to Stuart Town in August-September 1928 and, while visiting Undoolya station on the 9th September, heard that 17 Aborigines had been shot in a punitive raid.

As soon as he was able to, he confronted John Cawood, who confirmed that 17 had been shot but denied that it was a punitive expedition. McGregor made it clear that he believed that an official enquiry was required, and for the first time John Cawood appears to have become worried.

As McGregor travelled north again he caught up with Annie Lock, heard her accounts of events, and also saw starving Aborigines. On the basis of the evidence he encouraged journalists to cover the trial of Padygar and Arkirkra in Darwin, and the news sensationally provided by Constable Murray as much as anyone instantly received

national and international coverage, with a League of Nations representative also making comment.

McGregor was quoted in the "Northern Territory Times" stating what probably Blind Freddy and a majority of city people in Australia were thinking:

"Was ever a battle fought in which seventeen were hit and all died?"

And then, to antagonise many central Australians by being forthright in his views:

"So many settlers prefer a dead walkabout black to a live one, we must ask ourselves what really did happen. Common sense tells us that one cannot call upon natives to lay down weapons in the name of the King since English to them is but noise.

"I do earnestly ask for an enquiry into the stewardship of the police party who represented us this affair."

Suddenly Prime Minister Bruce and other Cabinet Ministers were being inundated with church, anthropological, and Aboriginal Friends Association letters and petitions demanding an enquiry.

From a majority of Stuart Town residents', miners' and pastoralists' perspective they were "do-gooders" who did not understand conditions on the frontier. Most of the mere 250-300 white people in the Centre perceived a number of their mates and acquaintances suffering because of the drought, being threatened with spearing, and with Mounted Constable Murray acting heroically while doing his duty. Why couldn't the rest of Australia see it in the same way?

Why, since no settler was specifically named, were they all being branded effective murderers by a priest who had spent but a few weeks in Central Australia, most of that along the Stuart Highway, speaking to but a handful of people?

John Cawood, being asked "Why?" from Canberra, was initially paralysed, and had to be asked again and again. The heat was on in Canberra!

The Prime Minister quickly agreed to an enquiry, but must also have been getting advice that things were not looking or smelling all that rosy in the Centre. There is little doubt that the Board was chosen to give Constable Murray, Sergeant Noblett, and John Cawood as their Police Commissioner, plus all police patrol members, the best possible chance of defence-survival.

The Chairman of the Board of Enquiry was A.H. O'Kelly, a police magistrate from Cairns.

The other independent Board member was South Australian Police Inspector P.A. Giles, with authority from Port Augusta to Oodnadatta who, however much he may have done his best to be unbiased, cannot be expected to have been other than supportive of fellow frontier policemen. And the third member was none other than John Cawood, Government Resident and Police Commissioner for Central Australia, who had approved every patrol.

Despite considerable protest about John Cawood's appointment, the Prime Minister did not budge. Local Stuart Town evangelical pastor E.E. Kramer was given approval to be present throughout the Enquiry, and to ask questions of witnesses, as was Constable Murray.

There is no doubt, in my mind, that prior to the announcement of the members of the Board, John Cawood, now sweating as much as Sergeant Noblett, met him and that between them they planned their approach. It is my perception that they decided that John Cawood would stand as clear as possible of the actual police activity, while Sergeant

Noblett would accept administrative criticisms, and convince George Murray that to use a modern expression they were all in deep yoghurt.

TROOPER

Sergeant Noblett was, as I have previously indicated, no fool, but he had also been a mounted trooper in the South African "Boer" War of 1899-1902.

If anyone knew about the military court trial of Harry "Breaker" Morant, and that a scapegoat was potentially needed by the Board of Enquiry as many believed had been the case with Morant, it would have been him.

Because of evidence of summary execution of prisoners and some civilians, and Morant's outspokenness at the military court, where he claimed that the rule of the rifle prevailed "we got them and shot them under Rule 303" and that the highest military commander, Lord Kitchener, had approved the "rule", he and a mate had been shot by firing squad. And because Sergeant Noblett knew that Constable Murray had gone perilously close to admitting the shooting of wounded Aborigines at the trial of Padygar and Arkirkra in Darwin, that the judge had concluded that Murray had shot down Aborigines "wholesale", and that Athol McGregor had stated that any enquiry should specifically ask about "the stewardship" of the police party, Noblett must also have ranked the "stewardship".

If George Murray was the key figure, he and Cawood, as his senior superior officers, were next in line. While a firing squad would not be used outside of the armed forces, there was little solace if a hanging was the possible alternative outcome.

It appears that they decided that the fewer Aborigines who appeared at the hearings, the better probably on the basis that at the Darwin trial Lala, as a key witness, with Alex Wilson as translator, had given hugely conflicting evidence that suggested both a Murray-inspired account and a more realistic one.

And probably because they also knew that, as an old Kaytetye man told a friend, Major and Dodger (as well as all other patrol members) had also shot men.

It must also have been decided that George Murray would necessarily take primary responsibility for the patrols, and that Jack Saxby would give maximum support about the "necessary" actions during the course of the first patrol. Randal Stafford and Billy Briscoe must also have promised to give full support, but had an agreement that they would always state that they did not see or hear much, and were not themselves involved in shooting people.

All of this is realistic supposition, I believe, but it is still supposition. And though others may disagree, I also believe, on the basis of study of the transcripts of evidence, that further planning involved at least the following:-

First, there was a need for creation of statements that would counter missionary McGregor's criticism of the use of English to order Aborigines to stop when none of the Aboriginal suspects understood it, and numbers of his other statements, including that the taking of Aboriginal women was a key cause of Aboriginal anger and attacks.

Secondly, it is evident that Police Paddy had had it drilled into him that he must mention that he had obtained hand-cuffs from Constable Murray at every sighting of Aboriginal suspects, and that he always attempted to arrest people.

Thirdly, Sergeant Noblett must have made George Murray realise that he was liable to be found guilty of murder unless he always stated that, after initial attempts to peacefully arrest men, he always dismounted to make an arrest, whereupon he must also state that he

was attacked by Aborigines resisting arrest, and had had to fight for his life. Fourthly, it must have been planned to state as often as possible that every Warlpiri or Anmatyerre person shot or fatally injured was one of the marauding, murdering group who had attacked Fred Brooks, or otherwise attacked or threatened pastoralists and their stock.

Fifthly, it must have been decided to state that the "Wallmulla" (Warlpiri) and Anmatyerre had a universal propensity to be "cheeky", and had threatened to drive all pastoralists from their country, independent of seasonal conditions.

I reiterate that these are my suppositions based on a close reading of the evidence, so can be called into question by others who read the transcripts, with alternative interpretations being given. (Police Paddy may always have requested and been given the exactly required sets of handcuffs by Constable Murray; Constable Murray may always have dismounted and attempted arrests; and so-on).

It must be remembered that this was a Board of Enquiry, not a Royal Commission or a trial, even though the people who gave evidence were all under oath to tell the truth. And even if the members of the board were very much hand-picked, none of them were fools. All of them knew that, however much they were meant to consider broad issues to do with Aboriginal conditions and frontier relationships over the previous three years, it was the "stewardship" of the police party about which the press was salivating.

The public perception was of a single punitive expedition rather than a lawful expedition to arrest perpetrators of crimes and, as Barry Hill has indicated in his remarkable 2002 book, "Broken Song" (primarily the story of Ted Strehlow), it was the "charge of general intent upon massacre", that was of greatest interest.

If proven, the board would surely have headed their recommendations with the need for certain people to be tried for unlawful acts leading to the deaths of people (some innocent) by shooting, with some members of the police parties being tried for murder. Any trial that followed would certainly also have looked beyond Constable Murray to who gave him his orders.

SUMMARY

Several select aspects, of many which could be considered, are now briefly discussed. The enquiry was held from 30th December, 1928 to 16th January, 1929, with a summary presented and the enquiry formally closed on 7th February, 1929. The bare bones are that 30 witnesses were examined, and: "The Board travelled by motor car approximately 2,500 miles principally over country never previously traversed by car and evidence was taken very often under most difficult conditions."

That a cause for violence by Aborigines was the taking of Aboriginal women by settlers was very much skimmed over. Those local bushmen who were asked about this absolutely denied it, despite the presence of children of Aboriginal-European descent at the "Bungalow" school in Alice Springs.

There was no attempt to question any of the members of the police patrol about this: under oath at least three of them, and possibly Constable Murray too, would have had to admit to sexual relationships or perjure themselves. (The board specifically quashed any discussion of the rumour that George Murray was associating with an Aboriginal woman).

The Hermannsburg Mission representative, who might normally have been expected to support lay missionaries Annie Lock and Athol McGregor, undermined any such support

by providing an on-the-spot invented throw-away line about Miss Lock's preference for an Aboriginal husband.

A similar throw-away line about Aborigines by the same truly dedicated and well-regarded mission worker, when he had become exasperated with them, wasn't all that appropriate seven years earlier, and it is just possible that the circumstances caused it to be repeated:

"They are like the hammers of hell and nothing but a bullet will stop them."

If the genuine "good guys" could make such utterances, the board was not likely to get much balance in the perspectives that they were given in their other interviews!

With local Stuart Town Pastor Kramer also taking a stance against missionary Annie Lock, the two new "outsider" missionaries' evidence about anything at all didn't stand a chance of being other than ignored by the board, nor did that of two other itinerant missionaries.

Indeed, the board stated that the "reasons for the Aborigines' action" included "unattached Missionaries wandering from place to place, having no previous knowledge of blacks and their customs and preaching a doctrine of equality."

While the board's summary may have been technically correct in a very limited sense, it was also a biased, prejudiced, unfair assessment in that it omitted reference to starving Aborigines, and made no attempt to discuss the accounts of shootings with those Aborigines known to Miss Lock.

It also ignored the fact that none of the missionaries had been "wandering from place to place" in the Broadmeadows-Coniston area.

More significantly, the board had been alerted to details of the first patrol by George Murray's almost boastful reporting of those killed during the trial of Padygar and Arkirkra in Darwin.

NEXT: The enquiry continues.

Alice Springs News, Issue 1045 December 10, 2003.

'THEY NEVER GOT OFF THEIR HORSES. THEY SHOT THEM DOWN IN COLD BLOOD.' Coniston Massacre. Part Fourteen of a Feature by DICK KIMBER.

'Real True History': Coniston Massacre

The 1929 Enquiry continues

Constable Murray's evidence that 14 more men had been shot in addition to the 17 originally known about would be expected to come as a shock to the Board of Enquiry members.

However it is almost certain that John Cawood had alerted the other board members to what he had heard from Sergeant Noblett and Constable Murray about more shootings (a point made by Murray during the enquiry), and that rather than themselves be "caught out" by possible revelations from others, the board members had indirectly instructed Murray to keep quiet about the second patrol, but mention incidents that occurred during the third patrol.

In the passage that follows the chairman's expression "it is now clear" might be interpreted as clarification of the previously unwritten reports, and under the circumstances I believe that it is an obvious thing for the board to have insisted that

Murray give the additional details.

However, the Chairman's questioning of George Murray was probing, as these few brief extracts indicate:-

"Chairman: Constable Murray, this enquiry was established to look into the events surrounding the death of seventeen natives. From your evidence it is now clear that a further fourteen lives were taken, yet nowhere does this appear to be in any report from you detailing such deaths. I would suggest that this is a matter we should look very closely at now. Let us start with the shooting you have referred to at Coniston Station when a native in chains was wounded. Who was present at that incident?

Constable Murray: My trackers Paddy and Major were the only ones there.

Chairman: You didn't mention this in any report?

Constable Murray: I gave my evidence more fully today.

Chairman: You made a report dated 2 September, 1928, but you also did not mention that four natives including one lubra were dead and that a fifth, also a lubra, had been badly wounded. Apparently she died but you did not seem to think it important to detail when this happened?

Constable Murray: I don't think it matters where she died a minute or an hour afterwards."

And so the questioning and the answers went, and similarly in the case of the third patrol, as again a few examples indicate:- "Chairman: In reference to the Morton case, did you in your report give the number killed?

Constable Murray: No.

Chairman: Why?

Constable Murray: I did not think it necessary at the time."

After further similar probes the chairman continues:

"Chairman: Could you not have made a supplementary report later? You have had four months in which to do this.

Constable Murray: I could have made one.

Chairman: Did you not think it of sufficient importance to make it?

Constable Murray: I gave my report to my superiors. [That is, Sergeant Noblett and Administrator and Police Superintendent John Cawood knew]. I thought it was for them to call for another one.

Chairman: Exactly. That is what I think too. What about the incident about your native boys bringing in two prisoners. Nothing at all about that in your report although you tell about it in evidence.

Constable Murray: I included them in the number who were killed.

Chairman: There is no need to hedge. This concerns the taking of thirty-one lives. You are far too casual about it. It has been suggested that these were reprisals or punitive expeditions to clean up the blacks so that they would never return.

Constable Murray: It never entered my head or any of my party as far as I know. My last instructions were not to shoot unless it was absolutely necessary. We had opportunities to shoot perhaps hundreds had we wished to massacre the natives."

These truly representative examples indicate that, whatever the Warlpiri, Anmatyerre and Kaytetye survivors and their descendants think today, and whatever researchers since the 1950s have thought, Constable Murray did not concede that the combined incidents constituted a massacre.

He did not see it as a "frenzy" of killing, as a television report recently labelled it, but as a policeman doing his job. And yet, as will later be considered, what or how many constitutes a massacre? Was George Murray correct in his view that it was not a massacre, or was he so hardened by having been present when literally hundreds of thousands of men were killed in World War 1 battles in which he was directly involved that he could not make a valid assessment? Or was he "covering up"?

As earlier intimated, a limited number of other points are now also briefly examined. Sergeant Noblett was castigated for his "slipshod method" of dealing with matters, and failure to ensure that both he and George Murray followed convention by writing detailed reports. (Mounted Constable Willshire had been formally criticised for the identical failure in the 1880s).

Under questioning Sergeant Noblett indicated that almost everything had only been verbally reported, whether between him and Murray or him and Cawood. He also gave responses of a "slipped my memory" or "I don't know" kind; and stated that he thought that the general reports were acceptable, though they omitted almost all details of any shootings.

My interpretation is that he was the first to realise the likely ramifications of the shootings, and had done his best to protect Murray and Cawood as well as himself by deliberately encouraging, as well as himself writing, extremely limited reports. (Despite having had no official police training, Murray stated that when he first took up duties as a Territory policeman he had learnt the correct method of reporting matters from a senior police officer, thus confessing that he had deliberately limited his reports).

Police Paddy was the only Aboriginal witness called. His evidence was patently a construct, even to the point of claiming that he and Constable Murray had examined Fred Brooks' body when all other evidence absolutely indicates that it had been already been deeply buried by Bruce Chapman and was not again disturbed.

That he gave his considerable evidence without questions being asked by the board, whereas all other witnesses were asked questions, indicates to me that board members considered him likely to give incriminating evidence if questioned. Where conflicting evidence was given by Police Paddy, such as about the death of handcuffed prisoners which would have meant that Murray had shot handcuffed men Constable Murray answered the later questions.

Similarly it was Constable Murray who answered any other "dangerous" statements by Police Paddy, such as that wounded prisoners were not seen again after they had been handed over to Murray.

In that numbers of the seasonal Aboriginal station hands and domestic servants had tolerable "bush English" and the station men all had some ability to make themselves understood in a mixture of bush English and Anmatyerre or Warlpiri, the board's inability to find a single Anmatyerre or Warlpiri witness who could have been questioned is remarkable.

It is also difficult to conclude other than that the board members' travels, in taking them over much of the Coniston-Broadmeadows country that was accessible by motor vehicle, took them only to what they partially wanted to see rather than a whole lot more to which they could have been guided.

Further to this, when the board members received news that Alex Wilson had recovered from illness in Darwin, they did not themselves request his immediate travel back to

Stuart Town to give evidence to the enquiry, but asked George Murray if he wished Alex to give evidence.

George, knowing that Alex had translated Lala's statements rather too honestly for his comfort in Darwin, was allowed by the board to dismiss the possibility on the basis that Alex was a "half-caste" who was illiterate, and therefore that his evidence would be unreliable. The board also supported Murray by saying that the calling of Alex would have meant a delay in the hearings, and found a degree of solace in George Murray's and George Morton's statements that Alex stayed with the horses while they did the shooting. However, since Alex always followed close behind with the horses, and observed what transpired on each occasion, his own statements are worth mentioning. As he told a friend of mine:

"They never got off their horses. They shot them down in cold blood."

Alex had a way of telling a story that instantly drew one in. He had hand movements, alert watchfulness as though never to be surprised when someone was "about", the cocking of an eye, the changing tone of voice, that were unique to him, yet understandable to all. "In cold blood" was an expression he used more than once to me when discussing the Coniston story.

NEXT WEEK: The findings.

Alice Springs News, Issue 1046 December 17, 2003.

1929 WHITEWASH: "THE SHOOTING WAS JUSTIFIED". Part Fifteen of a Feature by DICK KIMBER.

EReal True History': Coniston Massacre

The enquiry's whitewash; the impact of the 1928 drought

Part 15 of an historical perspective by DICK KIMBER

Although Alex Wilson could have returned from hospital to help the enquiry, particularly with the questioning of Aboriginal witnesses, he commented later that there was a police contingency plan that occurred to prevent this.

For a time after his hospitalisation he was sent out east of Darwin to work in the constantly relocating buffalo hunting camps. That way he was as uncontactable as Tracker Major, who was said to have gone "walkabout."

As Alex told me at the end of my last yarn with him on 17th December, 1988, when he had been referring to the 1928 patrols when the Aborigines were shot "like dogs", this was: "With mine own eye, what I have seen."

He added, as a perception of his whole life, yet with particular reference to the "bad old days" of the killing times on Coniston and Broadmeadows:

"That's real true history, that.

"But that's in my mind, and what I've seen with my own eyes. Oh, the things I seen!

"Got to keep your tongue shut, or you might get it shot off."

YARNING Old Alex laughed at the thought, and I chuckled with him, but there were only the two of us yarning when he laughed. He was ever a "look about man", making sure that his audience was who he intended it to be.

In that the board members accepted the evidence presented by George Murray that he had always called upon Aboriginal men to put down their weapons (and there are

corroborative statements that this sometimes occurred), and that he only shot in self-defence when men resisted arrest and attacked him, he was declared to have acted lawfully in the carrying out of his duties as a police officer.

He accepted responsibility for the shooting of by far the majority of the 31 Aborigines, and all others who shot them were exonerated. This strains credulity, given the evidence that was presented, and the board seems to me to have allowed itself a bit of leeway in the truth of its findings.

"The Board is prepared to believe the evidence of all witnesses" is not exactly a ringing endorsement, prefaced as it is by the view that Jack Saxby was "afraid to admit that he killed some of the blacks."

However, to emphasise that they did not believe that the patrols were punitive expeditions, the board summarised all evidence and police party statements, which indicate that not all people were shot, and concluded of the two patrols and the Tilmouth shooting:

"(a). The shooting was justified.

(b). The shooting was justified.

(c). The shooting was justified."

Given that this was the Board of Enquiry's determination, the members obviously needed to find other evidence to explain "things". The Aborigines and their supporters were clearly the only other people who could be blamed.

What could the reasons be seen to have been? The idea that the "Walmulla" were by nature "cheeky", and were intent on driving all white people out of their and their neighbours' country, was developed.

After one or two pastoralists had mentioned this, without indicating that they may have contributed to the Aboriginal warriors' actions, Nugget Morton made a statement that the board effectively endorsed for the entire area:

"[The Walmulla tribe] are more ferocious than other wild blacks. I have heard several times from my blacks that this Walmulla tribe had boasted that they were going to wipe the white man out. I have heard the names of some of the white men myself, Sandford my partner, Tilmouth, Stafford and Turner [Tilmouth's then partner on Napperby] and also the working black boys. I gave no provocation whatsoever for the attack and I gave them food when they asked for it."

Many other aspects could be commented upon, but one more will suffice, and that is the subject of drought and its impact on the Aborigines.

DROUGHT From 1874-1923 inclusive the average rainfall in Alice Springs was 289mm. A drought then commenced, and between 1924-1927 the average was 196mm. In 1928, the fifth year of the drought, only 61 mm fell, the lowest on record to that time, and in 1929 only 143mm fell.

The figures at Barrow Creek showed an identical trend, the average for 1884-1923 being 307 mm, then 253 from 1924-1927, dropping to 86mm in 1928, and increasing to 181mm in 1929.

As early as 1925 the waterholes of the MacDonnell Ranges were described by Philipa Bridges as "places of tragedy", with dead horses and bullocks lying by the water's edge, and other animals being in "pitiable" condition.

Cecil Madigan described 1927 as one of the years of a "bad drought, which was not to break for two years more".

Michael Terry's evidence is that every pastoralist in the north-west other than Randal Stafford was obliged to shift camp to other waters, and that Randal had employed Jack Saxby to dig another well in any case. He also commented of the country towards Napperby station:

"Not a bird, not a beast, no cattle, no horses; everything had succumbed either to death or in weary migration to less cruel parts."

Norman Tindale, a legendary ethnographer, reported in his "Aboriginal Tribes Of Australia" (1974) of the summer of 1928-1929 that, so severe was the drought out west and north-west of Stuart Town, that "no [witjuti] grubs could be found on the roots of the Acacia excelsior shrubs; native banana greens were absent or all had been eaten by starving animals; kangaroos had migrated elsewhere and the Triodia grass had neither set seed heads nor had the summer grasses been able to grow and seed.

"The oily seed heads of the Calandrinia and other succulent plants were absent. Results were abject starvation with the appearance of a form of scurvy ..."

The Board of Enquiry accepted that there was a drought, knew that Miss Lock and Athol McGregor had reported genuine cases of starvation, but preferred to accept Constable Murray's comment:

"There was no such thing as starvation in any part of the country I have travelled to. There is ample native food and water. During the last ten days I was out I found plenty of native foods myself."

SCAVENGING

Not one of the board members, who had often found conditions "most difficult", thought to ask what kinds of "native foods" Constable Murray had delighted in eating.

Were they the scavenging crows, falcons and wedge-tailed eagles feeding on the corpses of the shot Aborigines? This is a likelihood, given that they were the only sizeable living creatures that Michael Terry had seen to the south.

It is unlikely that they were the camp-dog dingoes, though some of them were reported to have been thrown on fires. However, there being no proof of the nature of the plentiful bush tucker, it is idle to speculate further.

Oddly enough, a few years later Nugget Morton (as one might expect omitting mention of his abduction and rape of Aboriginal women) commented to Patrol Officer Ted Strehlow, "It all started in the Big Drought. All the stations around here were eaten out bare and the cattle men had to shift their cattle out to the Lander River." However the Board of Enquiry listened to Constable Murray, and concluded in their Summary:

"[The] Board wishes to state that there is no evidence of any starvation of blacks in Central Australia. On the contrary, there is evidence of ample native food and water." As with other people at the time, and researchers over the last 40 years, I have a bit of trouble with this perception. I have no doubt that occasional springs or soakage waters such as Brooks Soak survived, and that some bush tucker was sometimes gathered or caught.

SPEARING

However, this doesn't mean that the people were not other than starving and, as earlier indicated, turned to cattle-spearing, camel-spearing and raiding of stores in desperate endeavours to survive.

Before the year was out, too, many starving Aborigines, including numbers of southern Warlpiri, were migrating in to Hermannsburg, having heard of it as a last-chance place of

food.

Dinny Japaltjarri, who was one of them, likened his own movement to a perishing bullock rushing to a water trough.

He was happy to arrive at Hermannsburg, even though many who had migrated were so weak that they died at or near the Mission. The situation was remedied when Dr. Cleland visited and realised that the main problem was scurvy, which resulted in a cure being found through immediate donations of citrus from "down South."

My own belief is that the Board of Enquiry was hand-picked to give maximum protection to fellow police officers. In so doing it may well have been doing as Prime Minister Bruce desired, but if not directly him, certainly senior Canberra officials responsible to him.

The Board failed to examine numbers of significant people (including Alex Wilson); did not seek to hear evidence from any Aboriginal witnesses in the Coniston-Broadmeadows country; did not ask numbers of blindingly obvious hard questions; and wore blinkers wherever they travelled.

In other words, as with some (but not all) people at the time, and as with all researchers since then of whom I am aware, I believe that the enquiry provided a whitewash more than a revelation of complex truths.

Others have in the past, and will now, disagree with this assessment.

AT RISK I do not deny that Constable Murray and his different patrol members were often at risk, were hard of body and mind, and lived hard on the patrols.

It is doubtful whether anyone in Australia today is living as hard as they did then.

How heroic (or otherwise) Constable Murray or any other members of the patrols were will depend on each reader's perspective.

As is indicated in that which follows, though, the focus has become fixed on Murray.

This is understandable, given that he was the policeman in charge of the patrols, but is also unfair in that others were involved, sometimes independently of him.

Keith Windschuttle, generally regarded as a conservative historian, emphatically stated on television in September this year that he considered Mounted Constable Murray a murderer.

The caption editor of photographs in this paper described him as a "mass murderer."

Was he? Why do many of us in the present day judge things so differently from those in the past?

Missionaries Annie Lock and Athol McGregor were, respectively, the only short-term resident and visitor of the years 1928-1929 who believed that he was by implication a murderer, but no other "white" Central Australians of the same time are known to have thought so.

He had been formally and publicly exonerated of any wrong-doing during the course of the police patrols.

And while some newspapers were critical of the findings of the enquiry, "The Register" hailed Constable Murray as the police trooper who "Rides Alone And Gets His Man Always."

(I suspect that that writer and his readers enjoyed the silent Western films of the era.)

However, it is also relevant to mention that, at the time "he received hundreds of letters applauding them [him and the other patrol members] on the ground that they had made the Territory a safe place for the white man".

This comment was written by Sydney Downer in 1963, after he had interviewed Constable Murray.

While he does not appear to have seen any of these "hundreds of letters" he leaves no doubt that he considered George Murray a man who had done his duty, and had been exonerated of any punitive intent. In other words, he leaves him as an heroic figure of the frontier.

If Mounted Constable Murray is to be described as a "mass murderer", I believe that it must be proven that he and the other patrol members, who also cannot escape censure, killed more than they indicated, did so unlawfully for much of the time, and deliberately concealed the evidence.

LIMITATIONS

The latter is already patently clear from the limitations of the written reports, and has been suggested in discussion of the three patrols' activities (see previous issues).

How many?

"Six hundred! Seven hundred!"

It was retrobate old Nugget Hunter (not to be confused with Nugget Morton) yarning with me in 1970.

I couldn't help laughing at his abrupt, gruff delivery of the estimate.

"I heard that it was closer to 60 or 70," I replied, deliberately dividing by 10, but in fact believing the number to be higher.

"Six hundred, seven hundred! Sixty or seventy! What's the bloody difference. Teach Œem a lesson!"

Nugget was clearly not all that reliable a witness, but he had been out through the Coniston country and Tanami Desert, as far as Hall's Creek, in the early 1930s.

And he had done prospecting, and been gaoled for six months for "cohabiting" ("Cohabiting! Why, we was only educatin' them!").

He had heard the stories so, exaggerated though his perceptions were, they certainly suggested more than 31.

NEXT (returning in 2004): How many were shot? The range of evidence.

Alice Springs News, Issue 1101 February 4, 2004.

ALL OF OLD GEORGE'S FRIENDS AND RELATIVES WERE SHOT. THE ONLY SURVIVOR WAS GEORGE. Part Sixteen of a Feature by DICK KIMBER.

'Real True History': Coniston Massacre

How many were shot?

Last year marked the 75th anniversary of the killings of Warlpiri and Anmatyerre people that became known as the Coniston Massacre. The deaths occurred following the murder of a white bushman, Fred Brooks, on August 7, 1928. His murderer, Kamalyarrpa Japanangka, was never brought to justice and lived into old age. Two other men, known as Padygar and Arkirkra, were acquitted of Brooks' murder. During three police patrols to find Brooks' killer, led by Constable George Murray, a number of other Aborigines Ð officially 31 Ð were shot.

The Board of Enquiry appointed to investigate the killings after a public outcry "down south" found that the shootings were "justified".

For a detailed account of these events see Parts 1-15 of DICK KIMBER's historical perspective, published in the Alice Springs News from September 10 last year. This week's article examines the hard evidence, as well as the circumstantial evidence, for the now widely accepted much higher death toll.

Members of the police patrol offer the best hints as to how many died, complemented by Aboriginal oral histories by survivors. Next are people who were out in the Coniston country, or living in or visiting central Australia in the 1920s-1930s, in turn followed by reliable researchers.

First I will examine the police patrol members' unofficial or neglected evidence. In the 1930s an old friend, now long deceased, was acting as driver for a new-chum geologist, when they called in on Constable Murray. After introductions the geologist, not realising that people were normally circumspect when talking to Constable Murray, asked, "Did you really shoot 31 blackfellows?"

My old friend instantly thought that it had not been the smartest question to ask, but George Murray was tickled by the geologist's temerity, and just as surprisingly responded, "That's all they investigated." No further questioning was permitted, a hard look indicating that that particular conversation was at an end. I have no reason to doubt this story.

Constable Murray's implication is clear, but how many more were shot?

In 1928 Jack Saxby and Randal Stafford both implied to Michael Terry that more had been shot, the former referring to the site Tippenbah and the latter to a site west of Coniston.

Randal Stafford, in discussions with at least two other people, also stated that he shot one young Aboriginal woman.

Jack Saxby, while admitting that he "shot to kill", always said under questioning by the Board of Enquiry members that he was uncertain whether he had hit any Aborigines. However, the board stated its formal collective view that this response was because he was afraid of the consequences of admitting that he had shot anyone, rather than that he had not.

Interestingly, both Alex Wilson and Darby Jampijinpa, who worked with Jack in later years, considered him a good, fair, man. Their assessment of him is likely to be correct, for they understood the circumstances that prevailed on the frontier. We who have never had spears and boomerangs thrown at us and literally had to fight for our lives, or who were not caught up as members of a patrol led by Constable Murray, can pass armchair judgement a little too easily.

That Randal Stafford knew more than Michael Terry indicates is recorded by T.G.H. Strehlow. The account is in an unpublished book, which I was kindly given permission to quote from by a Strehlow Research Centre officer, and recreates a conversation Strehlow had with Randal in 1932. Randal does not give any details of his own involvement in the patrols, other than to say he led the party to Brooks' Soak. His account reads:

"Well, four years are gone since it all happened; and lots of blacks were shot for it [the murder of Brooks]. I don't approve of all that the police party did afterwards. I only know of most of their doings by hearsay, of course, for I would not go out far with the police myself ...

"But I can tell you this: most of the things they did were hushed up afterwards at the

official enquiry. I had enough of it when I saw Murray coming back to the party after shooting several blacks at the first encounter. "But Murray, Nugget Morton, Police-tracker Paddy, and the rest went on with lots of rifles and bullets; and I was told that they shot down myalls up and down the Lander River for many miles.

"At the enquiry they owned up, I believe, to shooting thirty-one blacks in all, and this figure included two gins as well. But some of the men who went out with Murray told me that the true figure was at least twice as high, and that's not even counting in the odd myalls who were shot from time to time by men like Jimmy Wickham ...

"Now I don't hold with such methods either. I have always believed in fair play and in British justice; and those sorts of shootings were a disgrace to any civilised community. The myalls that did the murder should have received exemplary punishment for what they had done; but to shoot down whole camps of blacks without leaving any live witnesses behind is not my idea of justice."

The only other member of the patrol of whom I am aware who later discussed the shootings is Alex Wilson.

When I first met Alex in 1970, or Alec as I knew him then, I think he took me for a prospector, for I had come into his home on the edge of the Tanami Desert from the droughted Western Australian border country, and hadn't had more than an eye-wash and hand-rinse for more than a week.

Whatever the case, Alex was as are most people, for he used to base his remarks to some extent upon an assumption about the nature of the person to whom he was talking.

For reasons I now do not recall, he yarned about the "early days, bad old days". He had a tendency to boast in the early 1970s and, while not giving a specific figure, he indicated that many, many more than 31 had been shot. I took it that he meant scores more.

I was not researching anything at the time, just having a yarn. In subsequent yarns with other friends and acquaintances, some of whom came to know him through working at Yuendumu, he also implied to them many more than 31, but I do not know of anyone who was given a specific estimate.

What did emerge, though, was that there were not often calls to surrender: people were "shot like dogs", or "shot in cold blood." He admitted to killing two men, one in self-defence and one in general affray. He also stated or implied that all other members of the first patrol shot Aborigines, including (as he stated in Bob Plasto's film) Randal Stafford and Billy Briscoe, both of whom before the Board of Enquiry constantly denied any shooting by themselves.

Otherwise he stated (and other members of the patrol had supported him in their evidence), that he had called out in Anmatyerre or Warlpiri to tell the men to put down their weapons because they could not "beat" a bullet from a rifle.

Constable Murray and Nugget Morton also voluntarily stated in their evidence that Alex was not involved in any of the shootings on the third patrol. All of these shootings were, according to Alex, "in cold blood", with many being shot down while Murray and Morton were still mounted on their horses. And Alex also commented on his deceit to Constable Murray, which he believed had saved the life of the then badly wounded Creeping Charlie.

As I said earlier, I considered Alex an old mate by the time I last met him, near the end of his life. I had heard other bad stories about him, unrelated to the Coniston killings, and he had explained them to me.

However I think, as the only survivor of the patrol who continued living in and about the edge of the scenes of the shootings, he bore the brunt of any ill-feeling by the survivors on behalf of all of the patrol members for the next 50 years and more until his death. I say, whatever your sins, rest in peace, old friend.

I do not know of any other evidence by patrol members that tells of greater numbers being shot during the three patrols, other than Nugget Morton's shooting of his initial attacker in self-defence. This attacker was not included in the 31 deaths that were investigated. It clearly should have been considered, so that the formal tally should be a minimal 32.

Now for the Aboriginal survivors' evidence, which has been alluded to in the discussion about the three patrols' activities.

A minimal 10 other sites where killings took place are identified on the map in the Central Land Council's booklet, "Making Peace With The Past" (2003).

Apart from the previously mentioned Tippenbah, spelt in modern phonetics as Tipinba, with Partilirri as the traditional site name, the others are all along either the Hanson or the Lander Rivers.

The booklet is very conservative about numbers, only mentioning that "[many] innocent people were caught up in the violence"; that numbers were "gunned down during ceremony or hunting", and that "it seems that there were many more" than the 31 admitted to. Referring to other sources they suggest that "the death toll was likely to have been at least double that", which means a minimal 62.

Other than this, I have only been given estimates of a "big mob" at innumerable localities. Since "big mob" has meant, in my experience, any number from six to upwards of hundreds, I have not been able to make a better estimate from Aboriginal evidence than scores more than the 31 admitted to.

As earlier mentioned, the book "Kaytetye Country" (1993) also indicates that Aboriginal patrol members were ordered to burn bodies near a Hanson River waterhole.

A further clear point, in support of certain of the enquiry evidence given by police patrol members, is that not all people were shot. Aboriginal evidence is definite that, while all were rounded up like bullocks, the women and children were normally "drafted" to one side and held for a time while the men were shot.

It was a cruel time, but the women and children were then free to run away. An excellent brief account, both illustrating this and challenging it, is given in Barbara Henson's 1992 book on Pastor F.W. Albrecht, "A Straight-out Man".

Japangardi is quoted, stating that the police party "shot all the people they found", with others fleeing unsighted by the patrol members, in one instance; told two men to go away with the women at another camp; shot a "lot of old men" who were walking on another occasion; shot some others of an exhausted group who "were drinking when they were shot"; and, on sighting smoke from a fire, stealthily approached the camp in which a "really É lot of people were living" and "shot them all", despite them not being at all aware of the murder of Fred Brooks.

Such an account, while not giving specific numbers, suggests that many were shot, and clearly indicates that in most instances they were not called upon to surrender, or given any warning of the police presence, before being shot.

Finally, as good an illustration as any, indicating both the sense of tragedy yet also the difficulty of gaining other than a hint of the men, women, children and total numbers

shot, is recorded in Douglas Lockwood's 1964 book, "Up The Track". He discussed the shootings with "George Japaljari, a seventy-year-old Anmatjira pensioner".

"All of old George's friends and relatives were shot. The only survivor was George.

ÔThey were bad ... bad ... times,' he told me. ÔAll-a-bout proper frightened ... can't sleep ... can't lie down ... might be whitefeller come with rifle"

NEXT: Evidence from Central Australian residents and visitors in the 1920s & 1930s.

Alice Springs News, Issue 1102 February 11, 2004.

CONSTABLE MURRAY, STAFFORD AND OTHERS SAW THAT VENGEANCE WAS DONE: MANY BLACKS WERE SHOT. Part Seventeen of a Feature by DICK KIMBER.

'Real True History': Coniston Massacre

Last week I looked at the unofficial evidence of members of the police patrol and Aboriginal survivors, all of which suggested that many more than the officially recognised 31 had been shot, but fell short of specifying a number.

The best other reference is probably provided by Miss Annie Lock, on the basis of Aboriginal accounts she heard at the time of the shootings, and by implication also some pastoralists' comments that she heard about indirectly.

Her account was alluded to in an earlier issue referring to Aboriginal accounts, but is now quoted in full as it appears in A. Markus's 1990 book, "Governing Savages". That she did not give the same account to the Board of Enquiry is almost certainly because she was extremely stressed; knew that her account was a summary of oral accounts by surviving Aborigines, not directly witnessed evidence; and knew that Constable Murray, who had the right to question her along with the board members, would deny such evidence.

"The natives tell me that they simply shot them down like dogs & that they got little children & hit them on the back of the neck & killed them & in front of the eyes of those they left they knocked the dogs in the head & threw them in the fire.

"They rounded the natives up like mustering cattle & cleared or shot them out as they came to them. They had some prisoners & took the chains off them & told them to run away & as they were running they shot them. This is the natives' verdict & we have to be careful and prove it, but, I questioned them in different ways & when they least expected it, even to boys & girls & they all say the same thing & instead of [31] it was over 70."

Aboriginal oral histories recorded by Pastor Tom Fleming at Yuendumu and ethnographer C.P. Mountford (recorded in Hartwig's thesis), as well as Bryan Bowman's comments to me about what he had heard from Aborigines, confirm that Police Paddy was cruel, sadistic and ruthless when he murdered children. No other member of the patrols is recorded as having been deliberately involved in such murders, and it appears that Murray stopped him murdering children after the first incidents (though he may well have continued to murder them when working independently during hunting down of people).

F.E. Baume, a journalist who visited Coniston station in 1932, looked upon Randal Stafford and the station-hands who worked for him as heroic characters. He accepted that they had no option but to fight to hold the station against hundreds of Aborigines, and in his 1933 book, "Tragedy Track", summarised:

"Constable Murray, Randal Stafford and others saw that vengeance was done. Many

blacks were shot. The missionaries claim that the shooting was brutal and unnecessary, but having heard from trustworthy men like Stafford, Rieff [prospector and friend of Stafford's], Trooper Tony Lynch and others of the habits of some of the desert tribes, I will not listen again to the charge of brutality levelled by some well meaning men against the police and the posse which saw that justice was done."

The journalist was entitled to his opinion, but I suggest that he had been compromised in his report by having been assisted and hosted by Randal Stafford and Simon Rieff. The law of the land at no time had indicated that a "posse" was meant to see "that vengeance was done".

In that he must have known full-well that 31 was the number killed in "vengeance" for old Fred's murder, and attacks on Nugget Morton and Harry Tilmouth, Baume's use of "many" suggests to me that he was not prepared to name the true number. And if "justice was done" when a minimal 31 Aborigines were killed in retaliation for one white man's death, the scales of justice were rather unevenly balanced, whatever was thought of the "habits of some of the desert tribes".

Cecil Madigan, who was the key geologist at the time of Baume's visit, was also a former soldier who had served on the Western Front during the time of terrible slaughter in World War 1. He was a man who was precise with his words and, while he only refers to the numbers killed on the first patrol, he uses the word "extermination", which suggests that he understood from Randal Stafford that a much greater number were killed.

In 1935 Frank McGarry, though travelling with Randal Stafford's trusted messenger Percy to "Tippenbar", where he met "Alick Wilson" (Alex was often called Alick or Alec), makes no mention at all of the police patrols. However a station-hand of the era, who worked on a neighbouring station, told me that he had heard from one of the noted bushmen of the country that "men, women and children" were shot. The patrol members, having located a camp, waited until very early morning, approached stealthily to ensure that the Aborigines were caught by surprise, and shot without warning. He had been told that "hundreds" were shot. This was a sincere account, with no intention to exaggerate, and the minimal it means is 200. I took him to mean more.

Paddy Tucker, who as previously mentioned travelled widely throughout the entire area of the killings (and still further afield) in the late 1920s to 1930s, was very careful in his estimation. He deliberated for a long time, initially using his right hand to count 10 per finger, then thinking further before telling me in the early 1970's that he believed that over 200, and possibly as many as 300, had been killed.

When I expressed surprise at this many, he said that the shootings were not restricted to 1928. Pastoralists, prospectors and other bush workers had kept things very quiet among themselves, but some had shot people whenever they came upon them through to the early 1930s.

The area had not been restricted to the Coniston-Broadmeadows country, but was more generally "out west" and north-west of Stuart Town, or Alice Springs as it formally became known (after decades of a greater prevalence of use of the Alice Springs Telegraph Station address, to which all mail was sent through to the late 1930s).

Much as Paddy was being completely honest in this view, I doubted that it could be 200, or even 300. Perhaps the fact that so many people had fled elsewhere, such as to Wave Hill, Hermannsburg and the Mount Liebig country, or as old Jack Ross told me, remained in their own country well away from the scenes of the police shootings, gave the

impression of a death-emptied country.

It was generally believed, too, when I first yarned to people, that some of those who had fled had perished of exhaustion and thirst.

Still, there was Jack Saxby's account of an earlier "shoot to kill" encounter, unavoidable in the life-or-death circumstances in which he found himself; a story I have been told which implies that Harry Tilmouth shot two other Aborigines shortly before Fred Brooks was murdered; Jack Saxby's and Randal Stafford's shooting without effect because of the dense scrub; Jimmy Wickham's shooting of two men and Randal Stafford's knowledge of such shootings, as well as his suggestion that more were shot by men like Wickham; Dinny Japaljarri's account of an estimated 10-15 having been shot west of Central Mount Wedge; and another account by Windy Jampijinpa which involved the shooting of his father out near Pilininyanu (towards Mount Farewell) in about 1934.

Furthermore Walter Smith, legendary old prospector, independently confirmed Paddy's belief a decade later. In 18 months of tape-recording with him, he only got tears in his eyes twice, once recalling his parents, and the other in recalling what he had seen out along the Lander River. He was riding his camels along when he saw numbers of spherical white objects.

"They were like paddy-melons. The skulls. A man felt sorry. There must have been two hundred of them Ð big ones, little ones, men, women, kids, everyone."

The bodies had either been left on the surface in the various camp-groups along the Lander, or buried at very shallow depth, the sand simply being scooped over them. Showers of rain had caused the Lander to flush down, exposing and tumbling the bones and the skulls.

Walter's image was simple but striking.

Apart from the tragedy of it all, the dilemma 75 years later is to determine what shootings were done by the police patrols, and what were done by groups of hard bushmen independent of the patrols.

Three others who learnt of the police patrols' activities in the 1930s were Pastor F.W. Albrecht of Hermannsburg while on a Warlpiri area mission patrol; the previously mentioned Patrol Officer and linguist T.G.H. Strehlow; and Charlie Priest, an itinerant worker who did not visit the area. They all recorded estimates of "over 100" being shot during the police patrols on the basis of what they heard. (Strehlow must have taken into account stories he heard in addition to what Stafford had told him).

In talking with Bill McCoy (long-term public servant of the era) when he was in retirement in Alice Springs, he indicated that he had heard many stories about what had actually happened.

In fact so certain was he that unarmed prisoners had been shot that he believed that Constable Murray would ensure a gun-shot death of a later prisoner, Willoberta Jack, who had shot Harry Henty in self-defence. Bill believed that George Murray would arrange an "attempt to escape", thus allowing him to shoot Willoberta. He very clearly warned Murray that this must not occur, and Bill believed absolutely that his warning ensured that Willoberta had a fair trial, and was set free.

However, as Paddy Tucker told me, it didn't do him much good. No Aboriginal could be allowed to get away with shooting a white man on the frontier, whatever the circumstances.

Paddy believed that, upon his return to Central Australia, Willoberta had been given

poisoned flour by a pastoralist. Constable Murray was backed up without him asking for support, and that was the end of Willoberta Jack.

Old Bryan Bowman, who managed then owned Tempe Downs station at the time of the shootings, but then later owned Glen Helen and Coniston stations in the late 1930s-1940s and thereafter for decades, was a most interesting character.

He had heard that Murray, as leader, had shot many but that Jack Saxby and Police Paddy were the main "trigger men" on the first patrol. He had also heard that Police Paddy had been absolutely ruthless, at one stage killing some children, and that on the later patrol Nugget Morton had been merciless too.

All of the other patrol members had had a hand in the shootings.

While he believed it entirely possible that many more had been shot, Bryan was unusual in having training in accountancy, and having a good "bush lawyer's" understanding of the law. As he also said, 31 was the only number that had formally been considered and admitted to. All else, however honestly stated, was hearsay or circumstantial evidence, even if the skeletons could all have been examined and been found to have had bullets in them.

NEXT: Murray, murderer or hero?

Alice Springs News, Issue 1103 February 18, 2004.

CONISTON: CAN WE MAKE A JUDGMENT? Part Eighteen and last of a Feature by DICK KIMBER.

'Real True History': Coniston Massacre Constable Murray, murderer or hero?

Before considering whether the "Coniston killings" constituted a massacre and whether Constable Murray can be seen as a murderer or a hero, I want to briefly examine the research subsequent to 1940.

I am only aware of three researchers after this date who interviewed George Murray, two of whom published their material and one of whom left his information in thesis form. Ernestine Hill, and Sidney Downer in his 1963 book, "Patrol Indefinite", do not challenge the figure of 31.

However, M.C. Hartwig's 1960 thesis, "The Coniston Killings", is by far the most rigorous examination of the situation. Hartwig carefully chose his words. His title, it will be noted, is not "The Coniston Massacre".

He appears to have had a degree of cooperation from George Murray, but also to have met some barriers. His estimate is therefore based on Annie Lock's and Pastor Albrecht's figures, and he considers it "more correct" to accept 70-105 as the number shot.

Douglas Lockwood referred to the 31 admitted shot in his 1960 book "Fair Dinkum" and his 1964 book "Up The Track", but in his earlier book of 1959, "Crocodiles and other people", had stated, "they were decimated and scattered, migrating east and north". This implies that he believed that a much greater number than 31 were killed, but he makes no estimate. (He does make the further point, though, that some of those who were forced to flee to neighbouring country were sometimes killed in inter-group conflicts there. While this is a realistic supposition, he provides no evidence for it).

In 1992 Kurt Johannsen was clear, from what he had heard, that the massacres constituted "an act of revenge", and stated that he understood that "one can still go into certain areas and find hundreds of bones scattered around in the scrub." His perception was accepted

by Julie Marcus in her 2001 study of "The Indomitable Miss Pink", but neither author gives an estimate of the total number killed.

Thus, as far as I know, no other researchers have been able to be more accurate than Mervyn Hartwig, and unless an extraordinarily detailed diary by Constable Murray comes to light (highly improbable), the estimates will always be very "rubbery", and open to debate.

Without going more exhaustively into the reasons why, I believe that there is too much oral history and circumstantial evidence that states or suggests otherwise to accept 31 as the number of people who were shot.

The second patrol remains a mystery as to details, but is likely to have resulted in shootings as well as the arrest of two men, given the evidence for the first and third patrols. My own conclusion is higher than the Central Land Council's conservative estimate, and I believe that over 70 were shot, and that possibly over 100 were, for Pastor Albrecht (see last week's article) was not given to extravagances.

However, as a conservative estimate, I believe that 70-80 people, mostly men but including some women and children, were shot or murdered after being captured or injured.

I also believe that, though Paddy Tucker and Walter Smith probably over-estimated numbers, it is highly likely that a further 100 or more people, mostly men, were shot in the station country under consideration, and in a wider general area from Central Mount Wedge in a western arc through Mount Farewell to Tanami. I believe that police patrols were not normally involved in these shootings.

Some of the people shot were killed in the period 1911-1927, probably mostly in the 1920s, and others in the period 1929-c.1935. Walter Smith's estimate of having seen 200 skulls and other skeletal remains no doubt included many who were shot during the police patrols, and numerous others who were shot both shortly before and shortly after the patrols.

And although Walter did not think so, it is also possible that some of the skeletons that had become uncovered were of people who had died of natural causes, or inter-group fighting independent of any pastoral presence.

Further to this, another 100-200 probably migrated in a permanent way to Wave Hill, Gordon Downs, Birrindudu, the Hermannsburg- Haasts Bluff country, all along the Overland Telegraph Line route from Tennant Creek to Alice Springs, and in the 1930s to the gold, wolfram and other mines of the Tanami, Granites, Mount Doreen station, and the Anningie country.

Many of these were women widowed as a result of the shootings, with small children to care for, but some also migrated because of the severe drought conditions. The widows were almost certainly all taken in by, and married into, the safer Warlpiri, Gurindji, Warrumungu, Kaytetye and other peoples of the country to which they migrated. These are the only people for whom there is a half-reasonable chance of identifying with any certainty, as they may have been recorded on early census forms.

Vast changes in Australian society have occurred since those times, 75 years ago. It would have been interesting to consider some of them, particularly the more immediate ones that occurred in Central Australia in the next few years after the events of 1928, but time does not allow for this.

Similarly it would have been interesting to reflect on the Reconciliation Commemoration

held out at Brooks Soak on the 23rd and 24th September last year. It was a moving time for many, including members of the Murray family who laid a wreath on behalf of everyone, I like to think. In the end, though, those who have it in their hearts to be reconciled will be, and there will be those who won't be reconciled, or perhaps feel no need whatsoever to be reconciled.

So, was it a massacre? Or was George Murray a hero?

The Macquarie Dictionary definition of "massacre" is: "1. the unnecessary, indiscriminate killing of a number of human beings, as in barbarous warfare or persecution or for revenge or plunder. 2. a general slaughter of human beings." Broader definitions are given in some other dictionaries, referring to general "slaughter" and "carnage". Although the evidence suggests that, generally, women and young children were allowed to survive, I believe that, whether 31, 60-110, 200-300, or 600-700 is the number accepted as having been shot, the witnesses' own evidence alone leaves no choice other than to accept that a massacre, or series of massacres, took place. When oral histories and circumstantial evidence are taken into account, the proof is strengthened.

According to the majority of people in Central Australia, and quite possibly in Australia as a whole in 1928-1929, the enquiry had proved that Mounted Constable Murray had been doing his duty when 31 Aborigines were shot. Only a small number of people, mostly missionaries or church representatives, believed that he was a murderer and that another enquiry was needed. To some he was elevated to hero status.

While it is important for every individual reader of these articles to make his or her own mind up, it is clear that there will be two responses 75 years after the actions.

Those who believe that the Board of Enquiry, though perhaps flawed in its membership, and perhaps incorrect in its summaries of drought impact and missionary influence, otherwise essentially "got it right", will at the very least believe that Constable George Murray was doing his duty. In taking into account the difficulties and dangers he faced, some will believe that he was a genuine hero.

Those who believe, as I do, that he deliberately covered up evidence; at times lied under oath; at times shot people down "like dogs", "like bullocks", "in cold blood" and "wholesale" (as the judge in Darwin perceived the actions); and along with the other patrol members killed far more than the 31 admitted to, will judge him differently.

They will almost certainly consider him a policeman who lost his judgement, and became a murderer as he led "punitive", "vengeance" or "revenge" patrols that massacred many people. (The degree to which his superiors and the general body of frontier people were complicit is another interesting question).

However, perhaps it is possible to consider him both a hero and a murderer. To consider him this way is, I believe, to contribute to the sense of reconciliation that prevailed out at Brooks Soak on the 23rd and 24th of September last year.

It is not meant as an attempt to ignore old Fred Brooks' murder, or the sense of loss felt by the survivors among the Warlpiri, Anmatyerre and Kaytetye, nor to dodge the issues, but to take into account a greater part of his life. Every single person who helped to kill old Fred Brooks, and every single member of the three patrols, could be similarly considered.

I think of myself as a friend or friendly acquaintance of Bullfrog's grandchildren, Alex Wilson's sons, Police Paddy's grandson, Billy Briscoe's descendants, Harry Tilmouth's descendants, Jack Saxby's wider family's descendants, and John Cawood's grandson.

They are not to blame for anything at all, and it is understandable if they feel defensive about their parents' or grandparents' generation. Can we of the present day judge them? It is doubtful that we can in a fair way, yet we often do. I will now consider Constable Murray just a little more, then pass my judgement on him.

In late March, 1929, only one month after the Board's findings were delivered, the famous aviator, Charles Kingsford Smith, was forced down by bad weather near the Glenelg River in the north-west of Western Australia. Keith Anderson, a friend of Kingsford Smith's, and a mechanic mate, Bobby Hitchcock, shortly afterwards arrived in Alice Springs in another aeroplane, the "Kookaburra", to search for them. They were forced to land in the northern Tanami Desert country, south of Wave Hill, where both men died. Further searches by aircraft enabled Kingsford Smith to be rescued; located the scene of the "Kookaburra" tragedy; and enabled a ground party from Wave Hill to bury Anderson and Hitchcock, and record details of the men's last troubles and their deaths. News of the tragedy resulted in public subscriptions and a demand that the bodies be brought back to their home communities (Sydney and Karakatta in W.A.) for formal burial. A recovery team of Miles, Nettle and Berg arrived in Alice Springs with a Thornycroft 4 wheel-drive truck, and on June 3rd were joined by Constable Murray with his T model Ford, and Stan Cawood, son of the Administrator. They travelled north to Newcastle Waters, then up the Murrarji Stock-Route, and finally followed the previous party's horse-tracks in to the "Kookaburra."

This was not easy going, and it still isn't today, and in all it took 10 days. Digging up the bodies and placing them in coffins was not a pleasant task, either. However, all members of the party worked well, and the mission was accomplished.

Constable Murray deserved every commendation for his excellent work, as did all other members of the group. It appears, though, that this hard and selfless work was then almost certainly undone by another act of mass murder.

Nugget Morton had withdrawn from the Lander River country, and was on Amaroo station by the early 1930s. As one might expect, he and George Murray remained in touch. In his 1992 "A Son Of The Red Centre", Kurt Johannsen writes:

"[Murray] was alleged to have been an 'aboriginal hater' 'Nugget' Morton and Murray were also allegedly involved in the 'Sandover Masacre' where 100 or more aborigines were either shot or poisoned after it was alleged the aborigines had speared some cattle. Apparently strychnine [normally used to poison dingoes] was put in the soakage of the Sandover River."

This, of course, is only an allegation, and there is no intention of investigating it here, but given both Nugget Morton's and George Murray's records, it does not "look good."

We all have saints and sinners among our ancestors, so how might we judge Constable Murray if, by some miracle of longevity, he were alive today? A Warlpiri man recently described him to me as "cheeky", a word which, in the context, can be translated as "deadly dangerous."

However, in my experience the Warlpiri and Anmatyerre never judge him as other than the leader of the police patrols in the Coniston country. Indeed, the middle-aged man who discussed the police patrols with me did not name anyone but Murray.

Thus, as with all legendary tales world-wide, Constable Murray has already at times come to represent all who were involved. This is understandable, for how many of us can now name more than Napoleon, Nelson and Wellington of the millions involved in the

Napoleonic Wars or, closer to home, more than Stuart of his exploration parties of 1860-1862, or all of present Prime Minister John Howard's cabinet? As historian Peter Ryan commented in "The Age" on October 23 last year, "History, with time, wears thinner and thinner."

I consider that, in the broader context, if Constable Murray were still alive today he would be acknowledged as of pioneering farm family stock, yet lauded first and foremost as a trained Light Horseman, an original Anzac, and a Western Front legend.

However much I believe that this series of articles has proved otherwise, he was not found guilty of crimes during the Coniston massacre, and despite allegations about the Sandover River massacre still persisting, they remain unproven allegations.

I therefore think the positives might outbalance the negatives. Thus his World War I service and his exemplary work during the recovery of Anderson's and Hitchcock's bodies would, I suggest, prevail in the media news next Anzac Day.

He would, I believe, be substantially rehabilitated from the role of murderer in the minds of most, and any other flaws on his Army and Police service records would be considered dealt with fairly during his decades of service. There is no real doubt in my mind that he would be hailed as one of the last great legendary heroes of Australia.

I believe that I would keep in mind his Coniston massacre role, and his possible acts in the Sandover massacre, yet I think I would consider him a legend too. Like Ned Kelly without the romantic image, he would be a very flawed legend to me.

It is worth thinking about this. It rarely happens, but a hero can become a murderer, and a murderer can become a hero.

And in Constable Murray's case there is every chance he became a murderer again.

Shakespeare would have written a wonderful play about George Murray, giving him an evil heart, a tortured soul and the gift of golden language. And I'm not being sentimental or meaning to offend when I also say that, on the 24th September out at Brooks' Soak, when Mounted Constable Murray's relatives placed a wreath of flowers in remembrance of all of the Warlpiri, Anmatyerre and Kaytetye Aborigines who died, in a way they were also placing it there for George Murray too. And for all of his patrol members. Some of you, perhaps many of you, will disagree.