

**Peter Gunner, interviewed by Justin O'Brien, Alice Springs, 20 November 2002**

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JOB So, you met him?

PG I worked for Nugget for five years.

JOB At Broadmeadows?

PG No, at Ammaroo. He got Ammaroo in a ballot, land ballot. I don't know what the year would have been.

JOB After the First or Second World War?

PG No, it was during the Second World War and it would have been, I'd say, either the very early Forties, right at the beginning of the Forties – because when I went to him, I was a lad of about 13 and that was in 1943, 'cos I'm as old as the year. When we went out there, there was another boy with me called Hogan 'cos you couldn't get men to work for you, they were all in the military. There was no stockmen or anything. I'd left home when I was about 12 and pottered around a bit —

JOB From Alice?

PG We came from Tennant Creek. My mother and my brother and I went to Tennant Creek in '36 and she cooked there on the mine and later at Scott's Hotel, which was Alex Scott and then I was coming back from Adelaide on The Ghan when I met Kay, who was Nugget's wife – Kay Morton. She had in tow with her a young lad called Dinny Hogan and Hogan and I, like lads would, this was a troop train, we got very matey together. We were the only two kids on the train. So, by the time we'd got to Alice Springs she'd decided – she was taking Hogan out to Ammaroo to work with Nugget – that I'd be good because Hogan wouldn't feel lonely and it was another free hand. They had no intentions of paying you, just feed you and clothe you. That's how I ended up at Ammaroo and I stopped there til I was about 18, might have been 18 and a half going on 19 and then I went to the Kimberley. So, I was with him for the five years in the '43 period to the '48/49 period. Then I went to Elkedra first and then the Kimberley.

JOB So he obviously wasn't a digger.

PG No.

JOB So it wasn't one of those digger ballots?

PG No it was a land ballot. There was another family, Rex Hall, who was a water borer, he ended up getting a block of land called Ooratipera in nineteen I think it was 1947 or '48 in another ballot. So, it'd be a typical type of ballot and I think ... Apanarra ... I think Apanarra might have gone in that same ballot. I don't know what other... You could find that out easily, through the Lands Department. You'll be surprised what you can find out.

JOB Was Sandford still with him at this point? I've got here that he went into partnership with Sandford in 1924 —

PG No that was Broadmeadows.

JOB Exactly. Had he given up Broadmeadows?

PG He ended up with Anningie. I'm not sure. You'd have to find a land map, a stock, a station map of that period – which you should be able to get.

JOB I've got a map but I don't know if... [*starts rummaging for map*]

PG Does it show Broadmeadows? It shouldn't show Anningie at the same time. He ended up building a mud house for himself. He took Kay to Anningie, she went to Anningie with him.

JOB Was it a dry time, '43 or —

PG No, '43, we were pretty lucky; we had good seasons on Ammaroo.

JOB Who was the local policeman, by the way?

PG Whereabouts?

JOB For that district.

PG When Morton was there?

JOB No, when you were there.

PG Where – at Ammaroo? Well there would have been... I don't think there was one actually. Tiny Dean is the first one I can remember at Hatches. And what's-a-name was over at the Plenty... fairly lairy bloke he married an artist and they had Simpson Gap for a while. What was his name? Nice bloke.

JOB Wouldn't you know it? ... I'll get back to where I'm staying and I'll find this map.

PG Oh don't worry about it. The thing you want to put in your mind before you ever start any of this is it was not a big place. You've got to look at it as if you've just gone to do the history on a little town called, say, Red Hill in South Australia and that's the whole of the Territory because there wasn't a lot of people. Everybody knew everybody and quite closely. There was no way in the world that any of these people that you're going to look at, like Stafford, or Morton, or Murray or anyone else wouldn't have known everybody in Alice Springs —

JOB Harry Tilmouth —

PG Yeah, any of 'em, Alec Wilson, any of them, they were all very close. So you're going to treat them as a whole and you're going to find that they're very ... like, Morton for example, Morton's a very complex character in that he was a man that

could do anything. Believe me when I say that. He could build a house and the lines would be neat and straight. He could build a stockyard no worries at all. He knew everything about fabrication of anything. He could put a windmill up, have it all square at the bottom, cement the legs in. He was a very, very clever and very talented bloke at doing anything. He had a very vicious streak, which was more a very quick temper. But in the five years that I was with him we put down bores with the boring plant that he bought through Dalgety's. We did all these sorts of things and no one taught him. He was very, very, very clever at that type of thing. You know, when we wanted a fireplace... 'Cos when I first went to Ammaroo there was nothing. There was two tents and there was a one room thing that him and Kay lived in and they never even had a stockyard, they only had a stakeyard at the six-mile and he hadn't been there that long. I would say he'd only been there about probably two or three years at the most. If it'd been any longer he must have had a lazy spell because they'd done nothing. When we arrived we started to put the yard up. We used to brand and that in the stakeyard and then we added to the house and we did everything, but he was... In all the time that I was there, there was only Hogan and I, there were no other men, there was two Aboriginals only, there was Lil —

JOB Yeah.

PG — and Sammy.

JOB Lil from Top End.

PG No.

JOB Oh, West Australia.

PG No... well... Lil was the one with him actually at Boomerang Hole.

JOB Right.

PG Lil wasn't — as much as they like to say that he was on and off every gin in the creek, Lil was with him for many years and still with him after he married. Although whether Kay ever realised the fact that Lil was close to Nugget I don't know. But in that episode when the natives attacked him, they called him out, you know, calling to him and he must have had some sort of a wurly or something rigged because he definitely had a rough table inside there, because he said to me when he told us about it, we were saddling at the time that he told us and it was the wet and it was very heavy and we were all there and he used to tell us tales about the mud hut, the Lander River and everything like that and he told us about this ... Because he went out unarmed, because the two of them were standing down there but they had their spears between their toes and were walking on them. And when they got him far enough away from the hut then they bent down and picked them up, he said he got a terrible shock and he went to turn back to the hut 'cos he had a rifle just inside the door but the third one came round the side. Now, for a long time I always thought this must have happened at the mud hut, because they had a hut there. Everyone says it happened at Boomerang Hole; I don't ever remember Nugget saying that. But... the third person came round the side, the third Aboriginal and got stuck into him with

one of those long killing sticks, you know, the boomerang that's got the kick in the end – the one you can throw and it walks.

JOB Figure seven, it looks like a seven.

PG Yeah, bit like a seven ... and, oh, I don't know, I think they took 13 or 15 pieces of it out of his head, split the skull right open and it was in, you know, jammed in, it was shockin' mess but it gives you an idea of how hard, how tough he was – he was a survivor.

JOB Was he out there on his own?

PG He was definitely at the mud hut and at Boomerang Hole on his own. He had Lil with him and they had a plant of horses and they had cattle running there, off the hole.

JOB Was Lil a local girl or was she from elsewhere?

PG No, I think she might have come from somewhere else. Yeah, so, I don't know what the real fuss was, you know, there was supposed to have been a big fuss about woman but —

JOB He'd got one already.

PG ... Well... See that was a very biased article, the one I read in that...

JOB 'Long Time Olden Time'.

PG Oh very... You know, 'a brutal man', 'circus wrestler' ... He could wrestle, so he'd done wrestling somewhere for sure, very interesting, 'cos he never ever spoke much about himself. Kay did. Kay told us how she was almost a war bride, so they must have got married right at the end of the Thirties.

JOB Right. He was from Footscray originally.

PG Was he?

JOB Yeah.

PG Yeah, I know of some of his family.

JOB Well, his sister, didn't she come up and marry a Davis?

PG That was Sunshine Bob at Willowra.

JOB Bob Davis?

PG Yeah. He was known as Sunshine.

JOB And his nephew, Shrimp.

PG Shrimp, who was a thieving, shocking fellow. He ended up in gaol, in Goulburn or somewhere. He even knocked Nugget's own cattle off. Shrimp was with him on Anningie. You talkin' the Anningie period now. You're talkin' Shrimp with Nugget and them at Anningie. You're talkin' Sunshine Bob at Willowra, with Nugget's sister and there was another half-sister – I think she was adopted. She married a fella called Hogan, that was Dinny's mother.

JOB Okay.

PG That's how they come to be there. They come from the Blue Mountains. Hogan's dead, believe me, he's dried.

JOB T.G.H. Strehlow went to the Tin Field to investigate whether they had dinky-di permits for the blackfellas, 'half-castes' and there's a funny bit eh. He says, there's a certain Shrimp, a man who obviously has no concept of the word 'shame'.

PG *[laughing]* No, that's right, that's Shrimp, he was shockin'. Only a young bloke, he ...

JOB 17 at the time.

PG We used to get the letters from him, with the little coat of arms of the gaol thing on it.

JOB Oh true?

PG Yeah and Kay used to read it to us at the dining room table. *[laughing]* They didn't come too often, they were months apart.

JOB Goulburn Gaol?

PG Oh, I think it was Goulburn. Don't hold me to that, I dunno which gaol it was, but he was in one of 'em. For some reason it always sticked with me that it was Goulburn but...

JOB Did you ever meet Alec Wilson?

PG Yeah, Alec Wilson and another lot of mates of theirs was... the Nicker boys.

JOB Ben Nicker and um ...

PG Yeah. But they... I never met Ben. Ben went off to the war. I met all his friends. A very close one of his was Jimmy Wickham, of Nugget's – he was a good mate.

JOB Did Alex Wilson ... I mean, he worked a fair bit with Nugget didn't he?

PG Yeah.

JOB I've read somewhere... The thing with Aboriginal accounts is that you've got to take them with a grain of salt. He said that he hated Nugget and that he was a hard bastard, used to whip him and this sort of crap.

PG I think there would have been a word of truth in that 'cos he used to ... He certainly bloody touched me up a fair bit.

JOB True?

PG Oh yeah. There was a case once where he got his teeth taken out, because his wife Kay, believe it or not, her mother was a dental surgeon from Victoria.

JOB The mother?

PG Yeah and she came up to holiday with them, had a look at Nugget's teeth and pronounced on the spot that they'd have to come out. She had a little travelling kit with her, so they ripped 'em out, much to our enjoyment, 'cos we, you know, it was the sort of thing we liked to see happen to Nugget. Lil, we found Lil one night coming home with a rabbit so we appropriated it off her 'cos we were always starving hungry kids and we cooked it and Nugget turned up out of the gloom and it was his rabbit, unbeknown to us, we'd never had touched it if we had, but he just kicked me, his toe of his boot, caught me onto the bridge of this eye here. Oh, a good six, eight feet I went, straight over the fire. Hogan disappeared into the bloody gloom; he wasn't hanging around to discuss any of it. But he was a hard man. He was a very hard man and everything like that but he's more complex than just describing him as Chopper Read.

JOB Yeah, yeah.

PG He's not that simple. He's much more.... He was a brilliant tracker – you'd never hope to get away from him. If you were making across country he'd track you no worries at all. We lost Kay once, they had a big blew and she took the car, of course she ran out of petrol and she ended up striking off across country and we went after her and brought her back. And I'll tell you what, he was tracking her where you wouldn't credit it that you'd ever, and also jumping to conclusions that that's where she'd go so we were galloping three or four k ahead and cutting in and, you know, to get back on the tracks again. Very, very clever. Sammy and Lil must have run away from Ammaroo three or four times, every time he dragged 'em back. But in the end they must have finally woken up that the only way they'd ever get away would be to go the opposite way to what Nugget would ever work out. So they headed south instead of going west, down to Utopia, that was where they used to go all the time. The other thing you've got to remember in those days, too, which I don't know how they've overcome it, is that one group of Aboriginals had *nothing* to do with another group. They were very, very frightened of some bloods, you know, like the Warlpiri or —

JOB Who are these Walmalla?

PG That's out Tennant Creek area.

JOB Right. Warramunga.

PG Yeah... yeah.

JOB I was reading something like that last night in a book called 'Desert People' and as far as I can gather these two tribes had hated each other since year dot.

PG Well – I think they all did. There weren't too many of them that got along. In fact it amazes me now they go to football matches the whole lot of them, I can't believe it. I've sat in a room with the shutters bolted at Utopia. There was old Trot Keeneth and Sonny and some of the boys and myself and locked so that there's no way they could get in and then once the fight... they practically fought in front of the hut. You know, with a group of 30 or 40 coming down the Sanderover from that way and a group of 30 or 40 coming up and not a mock battle for the Duke of Edinburgh, believe me they were into it. They were really into, you know.

JOB So, you'd have to be hard, if you were out there in the Twenties, Thirties, Forties.

PG Survival.

JOB So he needed to draw a line in the sand.

PG Well I think so and I think... See, you've got to remember there was no interrelation between Aboriginal male and white male. They worked for you, you fed them, you'd clothe them, you'd give 'em 'nikki nikki' but you didn't ask 'em —

JOB What's 'nikki nikki'?

PG Tobacco, stick tobacco, used to be all sorts of ones, Yacht Brand and all the rest of it, you know, and they'd break it off in a stick that's about, oh I suppose about 75 mil long, about 20 mil wide and about 10 mil thick and they snapped off a big square block and they were a stick. But there was no interaction, you didn't ask 'em how their Auntie Arabelle was doing or anything like that. The only thing you'd ask 'em about was whatever information you wanted. Right? So if you wanted to know if, say one had just walked through from Daygwamurri and he turned up there you'd want to know what water he'd struck and things like, you know, especially if it'd been raining, you know, how far did the rain go, things like that. And that took a lot of getting out. But there was no interaction – these weren't people that interacted and in fact if you were working for one of those old fellas and you started to get a bit friendly with some of the young ones you'd be pulled right into gear. 'Cos they always reckoned – and I think there must have been a grain of truth in it – that that sort of familiarity ended up with cheekiness and no respect.

JOB Well that's what Harry Tilmouth told Strehlow in '32. He said, 'look, all these bloody troubles are because Stafford is being... he's treating them too well, they're getting cheeky and pushing him round. Did you ever meet him?

PG No. What did they used to call him? The roan stag. I knew his son. His son, believe it or not, was a fella called Yella Jack that worked on Elkedra but he was Randall Stafford's son.

JOB Half-caste?

- PG Yeah.
- JOB Apparently he had a girl called Alice, she was Warlpiri, I believe, and he had two girls with her and a son later and the two girls went down and stopped with Stafford's sister in Adelaide to be trained as, you know, proper civilised home —
- PG Well the son knew he was Randall's boy. He was a good stockman and that, he worked on Elkedra, he ran the camp a bit there, to a certain extent, there was another old fella. When I was there old Reilly still owned it and then a fellow known as McKay, they owned Sunshine Massey harvesters or whatever it was, he bought it. H.V. McKay. He bought the station and then he put in a manager, which was Johnny Driver and then not long after that I left, but Donald Dinny and Yella Jack they were the two half-castes. They were both there then and that was definitely Randall Stafford's son, this Yella Jack.
- JOB And what about relations with the women. I mean, it was pretty much an all-male affair —
- PG There were no women, the only women, really, were coloured women. Yeah.
- JOB He must have treated, I mean, Lil... He probably knocked her around a bit but she was with him a long time.
- PG Oh yeah. Well, what was it, it was somewhere in '28 or '29, Coniston, and give her a couple of years before that and say she went with him in '26, take '46 and you're looking at 20 years. She ran away in '46 and finally got away, her and Sammy — so she would have been with him for 20 years.
- JOB Sammy was?
- PG Sammy was the bloke that Nugget got for Lil, see, so that he had a little couple. Where he picked Sammy up from I don't know but I'd say probably Anningie. They moved from Anningie to Ammaroo, they owned one motorcar which Nugget bought when he got married and that motorcar was about a '37/'38 model International, so that's about when they got married, him and Kay. It was a little brown, nuggetty brown —
- JOB Where'd they get married?
- PG Dunno. They used to have a few personal effects like a tie that looked to be red and blue from some ship or other and postcards and things like that — so I think they must have had a bit of a honeymoon somewhere. I remember she always said to me that she'd just missed out on being a war bride, because '39 would have ... So somewhere in that year or so before '39. She was a very nice person, Kay.
- JOB What did he build when you were there? Did he build more than just the hut that you described earlier?
- PG Well, he built the square room and then we put a verandah on at the back and then we built another room there, 'cos later on, not long before I left she got a housemaid,



which was Rona Laughton, a half-caste girl from Alice Springs whose father, Mick Laughton... Nugget used to hire him now and then when we were taking cattle to Alice Springs. So he used to come out to build up a team, so there'd be Nugget, Mick and Hogan and I and sometimes Mick would bring another bloke out with him.

JOB Alex Wilson ever come on those?

PG No, I only ever saw Alec Wilson once, I think it was in Alice Springs. The bitumen that the military put in was like a dividing line between east and west, really, and the road prior to that when we first went up it was just a dirt track. It used to take you... Oh, you'd leave Alice Springs and you could say two days to get to Tennant if you didn't have too much trouble on the sand hills. There was big sand hills just north of Barrow Creek, you know, where you come round that bend and go over that creek called the Taylor and then you rise up out of the other side, well they was sand hills. If you ever go through there slowly and look out each side it's just a big long ridge of sand hill and everyone used to get stuck there.

JOB So did he build a homestead for him and Kay while you were there?

PG Oh yes, that room ended up with a front verandah with their bedroom, a back verandah where the housekeeper was, they split the thing and had a kitchen on the east side and the living area there, we put a fireplace in, made out of beaten out oil cans and that, very beautiful and quite a good fireplace.

JOB What was the floor?

PG The floor was antbed with a stuff called Melthoid over the top of it and the Melthoid was a black stuff that looked like lino and had a silver fleck in it when it used to be new. When we put it down it was a very light grey with a silver fleck in it and you used to put it down and roll it out and what we used to do was, do the floor the same as if you were laying cement. It was a mixture of antbed and a bit of goat, 'cos we had a lot of goats, we had two or three hundred goats there and a big yard. We used to mix it up together and put it down and it used to bind – go as hard as anything. Then we used to lay the Melthoid out and then paint the edge of the Melthoid about two inches wide with a paintbrush dipped in kerosene, right along it and then lay the second one over it and those two would bond together, 'cos it was a 'bitumestic' type of thing and the kero would melt it and they'd go together. Now when it was all finished it'd ... Kay used to get the bucket of water to mop and put about a teaspoon full of kero in the water and when she used to mop it the floor used to come up very glossy.

JOB And what tools... I'm interested in ... I've been reading a bit of R.M. Williams lately and ... What did you build with?

PG Well we had adzes and a broad axe, 'cos the house was built out of bloodwood and used to adze the posts off, not take the complete round out of 'em but bring them through so they were straight and square and they were the main uprights, they'd be all probably around five or six inch bloodwoods —

JOB Nice strong one.

PG — yeah and the rest of it'd be mulga and we used to adze that off ... and in some cases now and then we'd use a bit of gum. At one stage Nugget got hold of some good cut timber; got that out of the army store here in the middle of the night, about 20 or 30 lengths of it. It was a cheesy stuff that white ants wouldn't eat. We used that to keep on going around the house. We had adzes, broad axe, [counter 354], and we also had other bits that had the eye in the end that you put the handle through and bored your yard posts and everything.

JOB How was the roof constructed?

PG The roof was corrugated iron, but the actual outlay of the roof was like an A-frame  
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JOB Oh, you did it proper?

PG Oh yeah, no he was very talented, A-frame and then we brought the two verandahs together so that they met and came together, you know, one running that way and one running that way and had one upright down through the middle of it. The roofline used to have an upright through the middle and the corners of the verandahs had an upright through it so they all butted in on it. Oh it was done properly.

JOB What did you do for water?

PG Water, we had the bore down at the bottom of the hill.

JOB Now, I dunno how old he is.

PG I'd say that Nugget was born probably either in 1898, 99 or 1900. I'd say he'd be as close to the – same as me – as close... almost the same as the year. Why I say that is one time we were going up to Burnum to pick up some barb wire and we called in at Tennant Creek and he was talking to old Colin Perry and I would have put their age almost exactly the same. That was in about '45 and that would have been how old he was then, about '45, '46, say.

JOB There are a lot of tales about him being very strong.

PG Yeah he was very strong and I'll tell you what if he got his teeth into anything ... I'll give you a good example. We were cutting yard posts. Now, in a stockyard, those posts can be anything from 18 inches straight across to 24, because you didn't have a big choice, but you couldn't use the young ones because they were too small. So, most of the big ones you caught the minimum you'd get would be 14 inches – this is straight across not circumference or anything – and we used to cut these things and we didn't have any motorcars except that one ute. So we had a wagon and horses. We'd go north from the station sometimes, sometimes we'd go east from the station and we'd cut these posts. [end of side A]

JOB How'd you it?

PG Well we had to get it up two other pieces of mulga or something, it was bloody heavy. This is only two kids and a man, so, you know, and we used to have to tie 'greenoed' [counter 416] ropes to the side of the wagon, put the ropes underneath the log and then try and maintain it where it was. Nugget used to do the pulling with the middle rope and we used to hold it where it was while he got another purchase. Used to take you a long time. Sometimes we'd have to tie the rope off and have a spell, boil a billy or something. Might be halfway up the mulga. Anyway, we were coming back one night and the log rolled off, he bloody wouldn't leave there until we got it back on. So we never got back to the station until half past nine or ten o'clock at night. We reloaded it, there was no coming back for it tomorrow or anything like that, we were doing it right on the spot then.

JOB Another couple of hours.

PG Oh yeah. The only thing that saved us the second time was we already had the rails cut and everything like that, after you'd done it once it was a bit quicker. He wouldn't put anything off.

JOB What became of him then? Was Ammaroo his last stop?

PG I left him, now, I don't know whether my leaving sort of broke the group up, we got very close the lot of us, or what, but not long very after I left he sold up. He sold the place to another bloke called Morton, no relation. In fact the name might have been spelt different.

JOB And where'd Hogan go?

PG Hogan went with him. Yeah, they all went to this place outta Melbourne.

JOB Not Footscray?

PG No [laughing] I don't think Nugget would have gone —

JOB Gone back to civilisation?

PG No... This place was, not Mordialloc, name like that, a peninsula – Mornington Peninsula.

JOB Okay.

PG They all went the Mornington Peninsula and he bought something there. Now, whether he bought a farm... Because the day that I rode off from Ammaroo I had a plant of horses and I left Ammaroo and I said goodbye to Hogan at the yards and I never saw Hogan again in my life, he died. We were very close, but never saw him again.

JOB How'd he end up?

PG He ended up going back to the Blue Mountains, he came from a place called Menlong Valley and he went back to the Blue Mountains and got married to a girl called Tricia and — Helen, this is Justin, Justin O'Brien, my wife Helen.

HG Hello Justin nice to meet you.

JOB And you.

PG And... Hogan was always very bitter about it all, because I think he always thought that Nugget would do the right thing by him and set up him or something, you know. I didn't realise that bhis mother was adopted, so that Hogan really wasn't a blood relation. I never knew that, I always thought he was a genuine nephew.

JOB Kay's family?

PG Nugget's family... But it wasn't. So, Hogan ended up marrying a girl, Tricia I know her as so it must be Patricia and they came back to the Territory. I think they managed Rex Hall's place for a while, which was Iratiperra. He might have gone out to Annetta or somewhere like that. They worked around that and then they went back to the Blue Mountains, that was it. Then Hogan got prostate cancer or something —

JOB Nugget. So he wasn't that tall?

PG No, he was, I ended up as six foot, so he would've, I'd say five-eight, somewhere round there, five-eight. Very solid.

JOB Wide?

PG Wide shoulders. Small hiped and that. When I first ever went there, there was a bit... I used to go to the movies a bit when I was a kid, to the Penny Dreadfuls, you know and that ...

JOB Heard of them.

PG I remember there was an actor that used to play a cowboy called Hop-Along Cassidy, I can't think what his name was, but him and Nugget had an uncanny resemblance to one another. William Mulford, no he was a writer, Mulford.

JOB Harry Tilmouth called him 'that bullnecked bastard Nugget'.

PG Oh solid, jeez he was solid, yeah.

JOB Big neck?

PG Yeah no, I don't think there was one. He was bloody well solid, immensely strong. As I said he's complex in that, I almost died once on Ammaroo, suckin' petrol out of a drum for the lamps, we had no power or anything like that. In fact, the first refrigerator we ever had was a kerosene one, which, you've got to remember was really poverty stricken. Nugget had no money and the cattle he had, some of them had come from a bit of light-fingered duffin', mainly towards Lake Nash way and

some he'd got from a family up in the Gulf – Chambers. Chambers, he got one mob off Chambers. Old Jack Chambers, he delivered some cattle to Nugget for Ammaroo.

JOB So subsistence living, just getting by?

PG Yeah. Well, we lived pretty good 'cos we had our own goats. He wouldn't kill a bullock unless it was a stranger.

JOB You ate goat steak?

PG No, mainly boiled or roasted, or salted. The same with a bullock, or a dry cow if we killed it, he wouldn't kill a cow that was capable of having calves, even if it belonged to somebody else, because the calves were Nugget's.

JOB Yeah.

PG But, very rare did we ever kill for beef. Oh, I'd say probably you could go into months, three or four months apart.

JOB So how ... Forgive my ignorance about the industry but I grew up on dairy cattle stations but you drove them down to the railhead?

PG Yeap.

JOB At Oodnadatta at the time, no Alice —

PG No Alice.

JOB And that would happen once a year, twice a year?

PG Yeah if you could once a year, sometimes your neighbour would do it for you. Like Bill Reilly, he'd be going through with bullocks from Elkedra, so we'd only have a small mob to send. 'Cos we only had about eleven or twelve hundred head at the start, they built up gradually, maybe three thousand but at the start you might have only three or four hundred to send. So you put 'em in with Reilly's mob and he'd take 'em down for you and one year we took Reilly's with ours.

JOB What were those trips like?

PG Bloody wild, especially the ones with Reilly's cattle. They were almost, they were long horn cattle and wild, jeez. Reilly brought them down to Ammaroo and was there for a few days and then the first night camp we made, they almost caught up with Reilly and he was going back! You know, they really could get off camp... and our cattle, our cattle were still sitting there and the rest were gone. They got stirred up a bit, ran around a bit but ours were very quiet, very quiet cattle but bloody Reilly's.

JOB Did Nugget always go on the droves?

PG Yeap. All the time I was with him. Oh, there was nothing ... I mean... He wasn't lazy. We started work at daybreak, us kids used to have and go and get the horses and

then we'd work on the things that had to be done. Like, we were working on that yard for a couple of years.

JOB And where were you camping? He had the house eventually —

PG We were in the bough shed up the back, which had no walls or anything , just a roof. We were there, we were at one with the weather. Then gradually we built a lean-to on the side of that and Hogan and I ended up in there.

JOB So, sunrise you'd get up.

PG Yeah.

JOB Have a feed, with Nugget or own your own.

PG No you wouldn't have a feed, you'd go straight away for the horses, get some damper and beef when you got back and then we worked on that yard. Must have taken us a couple of years to work on that yard. Bloody hell, you know, he —

JOB Anything left of that yard?

PG Dunno. I haven't been to Ammaroo since I left there. But, there's a good description of Ammaroo in that [*handing his written piece*].

JOB Now, I wanted to talk about if he ever talked about Coniston, the killings, and if he ever talked about Murray. 'Cos in that letter to the paper where you rightfully respond, bloody journo got it wrong as they always do, um... you said that he regretted it.

PG He did, because he had a good relationship with Aboriginals.

JOB They respected ... They knew the line.

PG They knew the line. They respected him and he respected their lifestyle and it didn't cross his. In other words, as long as they didn't kill his cattle, or that, he was always willing to share meat and you've got to remember that the native situation is totally different to anything you might come across today. Just a brief thing there, there was no Aboriginal communities, because there was no water. So they were nomads and they walked all the time. The only time they'd stop is if the waterhole was full wherever they landed and as soon as it got down then they had to move on. So you've got to remember that until the white man came with his cattle and his bores and his wells and his whips to pull water, there was nowhere for an Aboriginal to sit down that he knew the water supply would be there regular. So the communities started with the white person. So, when Alice Springs started, it had waterholes but they used to dry up too. Right? But that's where you got your first communities around Alice, because the white bloke was there to guarantee there'd be a water supply and the same with all the stations. It was the same with Utopia, same with Ammaroo even, because you've got these people... I think they talk about the natives in the Kalahari ... boy these people were tough. You had to meet these people when they'd walked out from the scrub from coming across from Towbramurri or Lake

Nash and they were skinny, dried up and they'd travelled all that way leap-frogging from wherever there was water and a lot of times stepping out because the storms had gone through, not knowing if there'd been any storms ahead from that point. There were native wells, we used to find them now and then. They'd be on the bank of a... not too far up the bank; they used to get into the bank of a creek or a watercourse and they used to dig down two foot, or three foot, usually about two foot, two foot-six 'cos I've been down a couple. They're bloody dangerous. And then they'd burrow in sideways and then go down another two foot-six to get on to the creek bed. You know, they'd sort of come down like that, like big steps. Then finally they'd hit a level where the sand and them were on a par and they'd get a water soakage.

JOB Crawl in there?

PG Yeah. Dangerous, it's all that silty banks, you know. But they'd start back from the top of the ... say the bank of the creek was like that, they'd start back here and gradually come down so they went underneath —

JOB Oh blow that.

PG Yeah. But there was a few like that. There was one for a long time like that out from Ammaroo on one of those flood-outs.

JOB So somewhere like Brookes Soak would have been – flash.

PG Oh yeah, I mean some of the whips too, you know, where they used to have camels and horses pulling the water and that and troughs, I mean the troughs, water supply all the time. But that's a bit hard for people to understand. And the other thing that I've always had an opinion on is the sacred sites were more, not so much sacred, they were recognised navigational turnouts, you know, like the Polynesians used stars, they went like that all the time, the natives knew where they were going all the time and they had these places where they'd meet and they'd break off. The word sacred is a bit odd, you know, it sounds like they're Islamic or Catholics or Presbyterians or something, it wasn't anything like that, it was just that it was, perhaps like you and I if we came from some small place and we were going back and we passed a big gum, you know, where we used to always have dinner camp or something when we were young. It was more that type of affinity with it. So when they wander round now and keep pickin' off, you know, ten year-old trees and all that ... it wasn't really like that. There were a few things that were woven into stories, but they were more big things. That might be something really odd, like at Tennant Creek or like that, a big bunch of black granite rocks that might represent a bunch of crows or something here that might be a dingo story or something but all those little places that they travelled through they never, they never had time for dreaming mate, they were flat-out keepin' alive. And if you slowed them down, you were left. There was no such thing as euthanasia, but it's the closest thing to it. You know, their elderly were left.

JOB Yeah, I think a lot of people in the cities of Australia romanticise blackfellas, they've got these romantic notions.

PG You've got three races, see, that's the big trouble. You've got the full-blood, the absolute full-blood, and then that started off with say the nomad —

HG Would you men like a coffee or a tea?

PG You want a coffee?

JOB Oh yeah, I'd love one yeah.

HG White?

PG White and one.

PG What was I saying?

JOB Ah, the three races.

PG Yeah, and then you've got the yella fellas and then you've got the Aboriginals that were with whites.

JOB Yeap.

PG Now today that's caused a lot of problems, 'cos the funny part about it was the part-coloured never wanted to be known as Aboriginal.

JOB True?

PG Oh yes.

JOB He wanted to be up with the white man.

PG No he was, well, he wanted to be with the white man. In fact you could get into a fight in five seconds flat over that. Most of them did, most of them were very good, most of them were... Percy Lake from here had his own little transport business. Different ones worked as station managers and things like that.

JOB And old bushies like Walter Smith.

PG Yeah, you take, Parksie, Dougie Parks. He worked for me one time and he, he ended up building that big motel out there on the road out there and all that but he went broke 'cos he stretched out too far to do it but immediately he went Aboriginal, he's now Aboriginal with his hair all curled up, bloody, he's got it orange, dyed orange or something, he's with a young girl. He's a bloke about probably 65, 66. You know, it was great thing for 'em. The bloke that stood up that time, I dunno who it was but somebody stood up once and said that Aboriginal affairs was a business and it was one of the biggest businesses in Australia. He got crucified over it.

JOB Not Charlie Perkins is it?

PG No, it wasn't Perkins, Perkins would never do that, I think it might have been Perkins that crucified him. But, it's true.



JOB So – things wouldn't have taken... It was a tinderbox in a way. What I can gather is that you've got a drought and the blacks are coming in to the permanent waters —

PG No. No, no tinderbox. No uprising.

JOB '28, 29.

PG No uprising. No racial problems – nothing. They're people of impulse. And there was no worries about woman. There was none of this jealousy or anything like that sort of business, but there was a thing called inconvenience. So if Brooks took what's-a-name's gin, I forget his name —

JOB Bullfrog.

PG Yeah, took his gin, it was quite with Bullfrog's blessing.

JOB Sure.

PG But it was inconveniencing him in the end 'cos he wanted to get moving. So he had words with Brooks, Brooks apparently wouldn't give 'em back, give her back, he'd sort of fallen in love at first sight.

JOB Now this isn't written down this one, but someone else told me this too.

PG Yeah.

JOB He wanted to move on.

PG Yeah. This is how it happens. Going further up the creek then, the next incident was Morton – not related. They had no, there was no insurrection, there was no uprising; that's all crap, that was Murray. Murray was a gung-ho, he should've been in India. He was gung-ho, definitely. Morton reckoned he was gung-ho — [*inaudible, counter 635*]

JOB Did he? Morton said that?

PG Yeah. I mean Morton was in it. There's no good saying Morton wasn't, he was in it boots and spurs and all but ...

JOB What did he tell you about Murray, Morton?

PG Oh, he reckoned that Murray got a bit carried away... some of it ... he wouldn't stop, in the end. They'd run right out of where they were, they were still going, they hunted every Aboriginal from one side of the Territory to the other – not a bad effort, you know.

JOB 'Cos he was a Light Horseman.

PG Oh yeah, thoroughly enjoyed it. Morton was a brilliant horseman. The sort of horseman that would have ridden with no reins and his rifle and been able to fire accurately.

JOB From the horse.

PG Yeah.

JOB I said to an old guy, the historian Ian Jones, he wrote the Kelly books, I said, 'Can you shoot from a horse?' He said, 'If you're a good horseman you do bloody anything.'

PG Oh yeah. Well you don't have to, you're just working the horse with your knees.

JOB Nugget was capable of doing that?

PG Oh Nugget was a *very* good horseman.

JOB And in your letter you say —

PG He was short-legged.

JOB Stocky bastard eh?

PG Yeah. Short-legged and if I brought his horse back from somewhere I had to lengthen the stirrups out probably four or five inches. He was a short-legged man.

JOB Murray, he saw the entirety of the First World War, eventually Sergeant Murray. But, in your letter you also said that Nugget, Nugget said that the figure may have been twice as high.

PG Nugget always said that it probably ran close to a hundred.

JOB Not thirty-one.

PG No.

JOB A hundred on his expedition or the two, Brooks and —

PG A hundred all together.

JOB All together.

PG Because he... When Nugget was talking to us he was pretty graphic about ... He was stirred up, Nugget, he was... He looked at it as a betrayal, 'cos he had a very good relationship with 'em. Regardless of what you might read, he had it on Ammaroo and he had it on Anningie and he must have had it on Broadmeadow, and he must have had it with those up there. He used to always share food with 'em, he wasn't... When I say share food that would be limited to sugar, tea and meat and a bit of flour, whatever he had to spare, 'cos he had no reason to fall out with 'em because falling

out with them would make his job harder. So he was always that way. But if there was ever anything like they did to him then of course he was going to turn right over. When I knew him on Ammaroo we hunted, I hunted an old fella and his family off number three well once, because the cattle, they were frightening the cattle and they weren't coming in to water and Nugget told me off over it, and said they had as much right to the water as the cattle did. Gave me a dressing down over it. And the only way he knew about it was the old fella come to the station and complained to him about it.

JOB 'That young bloke come and, he bin chase me away...'

PG Nah, 'Them two young fella bin chasin' us from that water. No let us get water on that well.' And old Nugget blew the shit out of us over it, you know. So, as I said, it's complex, you know. You're looking at the ides of rage – they're two different things: what can be done with a heated moment and as I said Nugget was convinced he was betrayed.

JOB So when you were on the station, maybe it was the wet season time, did he talk about the actual riding out through Circle Well and White Stone, did he talk about the shootings ever?

PG Of the natives?

JOB With Murray.

PG He was graphic enough to say that the gins was pushin' the little kids into the rabbit holes in the creek bank.

JOB They weren't enough safe?

PG I don't think anything was safe. Well, if the mother was killed and you've only got to remember what Murray said... you know ... No one would have been safe.

JOB What did Murray say?

PG He said to that judge at the commission —

JOB 'What's the use of a wounded blackfellow hundreds of miles from civilisation?'

PG Yeah. He was the hard bastard. He was the vicious, cold – I mean some coppers were like that. I mean I had good friends, I had old Gordon Stott at Newcastle Waters and Tiny Deane he was always pretty fair with me. But most of those old blokes were pretty good, I mean, they were God. You know, births, deaths and marriages, the whole lot.

JOB I reckon he fell out with the other coppers. I don't think they liked him.

PG No. I think you'll find that Murray was even too vicious for them. There was a stage here after the war going into the ... when would that have been? ... about the late Sixties when the Northern Territory Police started to take a turn for the worse and get

a lot of young gung-ho bits of vicious police then. Whoever was settin' 'em up and telling 'em that they were goin' out to do something was setting them up a bit wrong and giving them ... 'Cos I can remember, it was a bit of a bad period there for a while. They seem to have gone too far the other way now, sort of lost a bit of the bite they used to have.

JOB But he regretted it, you mentioned in your letter.

PG Oh yeah, he —

JOB Like it went too far.

PG Well, put it this way, we weren't his Father Confessor, we were two 13 year-old, 14 year-old boys, say, by this time and we were saddling, in other words it was the wet and we'd dragged all the gear onto the back verandah of the house and we'd squat. There was only Kay, Nugget and us two kids and the two Aboriginals, Sammy and Lil. And he was just, he liked to talk a bit, wasn't over the odds at vocalising but when he did, sort of, he'd just ramble on, if you let him go. Now he didn't, he didn't... When he regretted it he didn't sort of say, 'Oh, gee I regret doin' that'. The terms he used were, 'I think we went too far'.

JOB Yeah.

PG To which, to me I read as regret, but ... Yeah they... I know there's a couple of other yarns that he said. Now, it's hard to be too correct on this because when you're a kid one thing can meld into another. But I know that somebody that got killed was under a piece of cattle troughing, hiding, and he got speared from both ends, they tormented the shit out of him til they got sick of it then they finally killed him. Now I don't know who what was.

JOB Hang on, a whitefella?

PG Yeah, but he had two half-caste sons and they were with that group, it wasn't Wilson, it was two other blokes. Now whether the bloke under the troughing was part-coloured himself I don't know, 'cos sometimes those things don't get recorded as much as a white man. But the two boys that were his sons, they brought the heads back in a sugarbag, of the natives. They killed 'em and brought the heads back in a sugarbag to the policeman and Nugget told me that.

JOB This is in the Lander country.

PG Yeah, in the same area, Anningie area. So I don't know what that was in relation to, because the Coniston affair, which is really not the Coniston massacre, it was the —

JOB It was spread out all over.

PG It was spread out all over.

JOB Just Freddy Brooks died there.

PG Well, Brooks died there, which they now call Brookes' soak ... and Morton was way up the Lander, I mean further up the Lander, starting to get into the, they used to call that midnight country because they used to thief all the cattle from Wave Hill and that, VRD, mainly VRD, that's how they used to bring 'em down. They used to bring 'em down that bloody creek.

JOB Here it says [*reading from 'Warlpiri Women's Voices'*], "Nugget Morton first passed through the country en route to the Tanami in the early Twenties. In 1923, for 29 pounds, he got grazing licence 357, 400 square miles on the Lander. He drove to Willowra from VRD..." I think he might have been duffing eh?

PG Oh yeah, no they were duffin'. He never had money to buy cattle. Him and Wickham they knocked the cattle off from Lake Nash. If it hadn't had been for the head stockman being a conscientious bugger they'd never have known they lost 'em. But he... It was the wet was on, they used to steal 'em when everybody was in the camp and wouldn't come out.

JOB Yeah.

PG And this conscientious bugger went for a run round, like track rope, and picked up the tracks where they'd gone with them and followed them, got the police and they all followed 'em. The only person caught out of it all was Jimmy Wickham, he was riding at the rear of the cattle. The rest all bolted when they realised that they had a full-scale posse on their heels and Wickham went to gaol. He served it here in Alice Springs.

JOB Stuart Town Gaol?

PG Yeah.

JOB So, a working day... So you're, 13 to 18, you're up at dawn every day, get the horses —

PG Seven days a week.

JOB Seven days a week.

PG But no feed. Remember that, you couldn't keep two goats in this backyard without after a month having to take 'em to someone else's backyard and then eventually to someone else's backyard and so on. And that was the same with the horses. We used to take the horses out every night around about half past five and hobble them out where there was feed. Then in the morning we'd walk to where those horses were. Might only be three or four miles. Later on when things got drier we'd take 'em out at night and camp with them. So we might have to take them 12 or 20 miles out and then we'd bring 'em back the next morning. 'Cos we were chasing feed by this time and the only feed left after a while was what was on the river front. So the Sandover River, I don't know how far away that was from the homestead — [*end of tape*]

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