

‘JAPAN FIGHT. ABORIGINAL PEOPLE FIGHT. EUROPEAN PEOPLE FIGHT’: YOLNGU STORIES *from* WORLD WAR II

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■ Abstract

Did you know that a Bathurst Islander captured the first Japanese prisoner of war on Australian soil? Or that a crucifix saved the life of a crashed American pilot in the Gulf of Carpentaria? These are excerpts from the rich array of oral histories of Aboriginal participation in World War II. This paper presents “highlights” from Yolngu oral histories of World War II in Arnhem Land, Northern Territory. Using these stories, the paper begins to explore some of the following questions: Why did Yolngu participate in the war effort? How did Yolngu see their role in relation to white Australia? In what ways did Yolngu contribute to the security of Australia? How integral was Yolngu assistance to defence of Australia? Although the answers to these questions are not finite, this paper aims to survey some of the Yolngu history of World War II.

■ Introduction

I would like to start with a story from Bathurst Island, off the north coast of Darwin. Islander Richard Miller describes how a Japanese pilot crash landed and encountered an Aboriginal camp:

After this crash, that Japanese fella out of the plane and start wandering around in the bush. He didn't know there were Aborigines peoples just camping there, nearby. So, wandering around and walked through bushes, he finally came out of the camp ... And all of sudden, all these men and women start running, and they left that one little boy laying on blanket beside the tree. So he [Japanese] went and pick him up and carried him around ... and this fella, his name is Matthias Womoor, he had the little tomahawk. So he went and hide behind the tree. So, the Japanese fella came by and then passed him and Matthias then came behind him with the little tomahawk, he pointed at his back and say “stick ‘em up”. So he stood like this with that baby and he [Matthias] grab that boy, little boy, off him, and then he took the pistol (Richard Miller, in *No bugles, no drums*, 1990).

The above history describes the capture of the first Japanese prisoner of war on Australian soil during World War II. This paper will discuss Yolngu stories from World War II – Yolngu being the Aboriginal inhabitants of Arnhem Land east of Darwin. I use Yolngu oral history as a window into their conceptions of the War and its impact on Yolngu society and settler relations. The Yolngu stories highlight not only interesting tales from World War II, but also examples of continuing distrust and mistreatment by settlers. The stories by no means represent a complete account of Yolngu war history, nor do they present a unanimous Yolngu version of events. Rather, the stories are a starting point from which to extrapolate wider understandings of the war's impact on Yolngu society and settler relations. Oral historian Heather Goodall writes: “The most constructive outcome of such collaborations [between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people] ... would be to have created opportunities for further conversations and exchange” (Goodall, 2002, p. 23).

It is my hope that, as Goodall suggests, this paper will contribute to continuing dialogues about Aboriginal people's place in World War II, Northern Territory, and Australian history.

This paper will proceed thematically across three motifs about Yolngu participation in World War II. First is the question as to Yolngu motivations to participate in the war. I argue that Yolngu saw themselves as independent allies, rather than as subjects of white Australia in the war against Japan. I also look at the question of coercion and analyse oral accounts that suggest not all Yolngu assistance was voluntary. The second topic is the actual work of Yolngu in the war. I relay two stories of Yolngu rescuing crashed Australian and American pilots. Scrutiny of the Balanda survivors' accounts – Balanda being the Yolngu word for white people – is especially enlightening about the continuing settler-colonial relationship because of the denigrating language and the pre-existing stereotypes of Yolngu as savages. The third section uncovers hidden histories. These stories emerged primarily through personal interviews with Yolngu elders, and they again stimulate new inquiries for further discussion about Yolngu involvement in World War II. I conclude with reflections about unanswered questions that indicate more work is needed in the area of Yolngu World War II history.

When using Indigenous oral history, it is important to consider the problems associated with footage, tapes, or transcripts edited for format and content. This is an analogous problem to the altering of written sources for similar rationales, but it is more significant here because oral history requires a combination of senses to comprehend the meaning – visual and auditory. Neumann points out the paradox of incorporating oral history into a report:

By the very techniques employed to record an oral history, we cleanse it of much of what has made it hot. If we take notes, we most likely will concentrate on the "information" an "informant" provides. If we make an audiotape recording, we cut out the rolling of the eyeballs, the pulling of a face, the scratching of the head, and further cut out the intonation in the transcription. We turn the talk into a text that can be filed away, fed into a database, reduced to a synopsis, and quarried for one-liners. It becomes a source like any other (Neumann, 1992, p. 282).

The Australian author Mudrooroo concurs and states that to edit oral history creates "only a colourful thread of quaint quotations which supports the contentions located in the standard English written text" (Mudrooroo, 1995, p. 191). To overcome these obstacles, in this paper I incorporate long quotations and to preserve the intent of the storytellers. I also provide the location of the original audio or video

recordings whenever possible. Their own words are effective and powerful sources, and I hope they come across accurately and intact.

This paper is very difficult to present because of cultural factors necessary when using Indigenous sources, particularly given my position as a white male from a middle-class background. By analysing Aboriginal sources, I run the risk of disrespecting, distorting, or undermining the authors' intention. There is a great body of literature about the cultural sensitivity necessary when dealing with Indigenous oral histories (Bradford, 2001; Hodge & Mishra, 1991; Maddock, 1988; Mudrooroo, 1995; Neumann, 1992; Rose, 1991; Tapping, 1989). A few key points have direct bearing on this paper. Bradford wisely remarks, "speaking for Aborigines and interpreting them is inseparable from [the] claim to knowledge and power—knowledge of Aboriginal traditions and power over Aborigines, who rely on [one] to speak for them" (Bradford, 2001, p. 109). Bradford also states, "[t]his is not to say that it is impossible for non-Aboriginal authors and illustrators to avoid filtering Aboriginality through white perspectives; simply that it is very difficult, and most likely to be achieved when white authors consult Aboriginal people rather than relying on the stereotypes and unexamined ideologies about Aboriginality that pervade white culture" (p. 9). Thus I want to clarify that I incorporate Indigenous sources not to exploit Yolngu knowledge or culture, not to appropriate their voice, but merely because a discussion about Aboriginal participation in World War II exclusive of Indigenous input is incomplete (See Ariss, 1988, p. 132). The Indigenous sources I use are just that – sources. They already exist; I do not create them, and I relay them with equal value as the written accounts of whites. The purpose of this paper is to overcome the main shortcoming of white histories of the war in Arnhem Land – the constant neglect of Indigenous accounts of events. Just as postcolonial theory attempts to rewrite the Indigenous voice back into history, my engagement with the Aboriginal histories serves to incorporate the thus far overlooked storytellers (See Gandhi, 1999; Young, 2001).

The seemingly simple question as to why Yolngu chose to participate in the war effort engenders other queries such as: Whose war was this anyway? Whose land did Yolngu defend? Was Yolngu assistance voluntary or compulsory? The common thread among various oral histories is that Yolngu were not members of the general Australian war effort so much as they were allies. They were allies because of their common hatred for Japanese and their desire to protect their own homeland (See Egan, 1996, 2000; National Archives of Australia [hereafter cited NAA] Canberra, series A373, item 5903). Phyllis Batumbil, a current elder at Mata Mata outstation in Arnhem Land, remarks "And they knew that they'll help the Army – Balanda army, Australian, and Americans, and New Zealand because

they knew that Japanese were the enemy” (Batumbil, 2005). The idea of Yolngu as allies, rather than as adjuncts or conscripts, positions Yolngu as significant actors in Arnhem Land. This contradicts the colonial perception of Yolngu as subjects that, as anthropologist Geoffrey Gray points out, would be expected to serve white Australia’s military unquestionably (Gray, 2006, p. 178).

Under the paradigm of Yolngu custodianship over Arnhem Land, the threat of Japanese attack would amount to an act of war against Yolngu. Non-Indigenous scholar Richard Trudgen writes, “Many of them [Yolngu] were not interested in the Balanda war, but they wanted to stop the Japanese coming onto their lands and threatening their families” (Trudgen, 2000, p. 39). Trudgen’s statement receives support from multiple sources of Yolngu oral testimony. Recently deceased Yolngu veteran Mowarra Gamanbarr recollects, “[Donald] Thomson said, “If they win, this will be Japanese country, and our children won’t have the chance to learn our culture”. Thomson said we had to combine with the white people. This was never done before. We all went to war, fighting for this country of ours.” (Mowarra Gamanbarr, in *Thomson of Arnhem Land*, 2000; See also Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre, 1999, p. 84). This assertion places a common goal for both white Australia and Yolngu, but he does so in a framework of defence of Yolngu land. Gerry Blitner also describes Japanese in Arnhem Land as a threat to Yolngu:

The Japs used to tell the [Torres Strait] Islanders, and the Aboriginals, that we are not coming back to fight Aboriginals, Torres Strait Islanders; we are coming back to fight the white man. I don’t know whether they were trying to gain favour with them or not. But not one Aboriginal or Islander took their side. Y’know. Everybody was ready to fight the Japs, and we knew that they were our enemies (Gerry Blitner, in *No bugles, no drums*, 1990).

James Gaykamangu of Milingimbi makes an analogous point:

Our people joined air force and army because, as we can tell, that northern Aboriginal coastline was the frontline during World War II. And, uh, the result of that – Japanese never ever taken Australian, northern part of Australia ... Our people was march with the spears, in other words guns. And that’s how was- country was protected, especially northern coast of Australia. And, uh, we have recalled that if the Japanese come and raided the northern coast part of Australia, the Aboriginal people in the north coast shouldn’t be living nowadays. And, um, that’s what Aboriginal happened during the war (James Gaykamangu, in NLC DVD, c1996).

Phyllis Batumbil actually refers to World War II not as one conflict, but rather as two parallel struggles. She states, “Yeah, that was during the war, Balanda-same time, Balanda war ga Yolngu war. So, you know, Balanda ga Yolngu lived together, sleep with together, to fight against Japanese” (Batumbil, 2005).

Phyllis Batumbil also hints at the Yolngu being forced to work for Balanda, rather than volunteering. She remarks: “This what happened. Because, you know, they were following-they were follower only, with the Balanda. Yolngu. And they had only one choice, they had only choice, which is to-to fight to withstand the Japanese only the night, during the night. And, that was the different” (Batumbil, 2005). In that statement Batumbil refers to Yolngu defence at the Wessel Islands, which I will discuss later in this paper. The relevance of her statement to this section lies in the pattern of Balanda obliging Yolngu cooperation during the war. Batumbil and Mata Mata elder Old Charlie both describe an intermediary’s role in compelling Yolngu participation in the anthropologist Donald Thomson’s Northern Territory Special Reconnaissance Unit (See Thomson, 1983; 1992a; 1992b). That individual was not Donald Thomson, though – it was the Yolngu man Raiwalla. Batumbil states:

Phyllis Batumbil (PB): Yolngu to fight against with Japanese.

Noah Riseman (NR): Yeah.

PB: That time. [PAUSE]. They were only forced, that was made by forced.

NR: Made by force?

PB: Yeah. Forced. Because, the someone was, I forgot his name. One of Yolngu, he was in Darwin. And, he made a-bosses.

NR: Raiwalla?

PB: Yo, Raiwalla. Now you thinking [CHUCKLE]. Raiwalla. He’s the one, he’s the Yolngu that he-[PAUSE] he told the other Yolngu about the war. So what he got the message from those two, I think it’s from the military or corporal people, in Darwin, from the boss. And he went back to Ramingining and to Milingimbi. And, you know, he spread, uh, spread the news around, news around to the other Yolngu. And, that way he made it decision to gather up the men only to join in the war. Was, the Americans and Australians, they-they told the, told the Yolngu people in Arnhem Land, especially the men, they told them that the Japanese are coming to, you know, to kill us all. Japanese he say are our enemy. So, we want the Yolngu to join with us to protect the

place and the womans and the kids so no ones gets harmed or killed (Batumbil, 2005).

Batumbil’s declaration rationalises Raiwalla’s allegedly forceful role in securing Yolngu assistance because of the critical situation and the common Japanese threat. Old Charlie elaborates on Raiwalla’s significance:

Old Charlie (OC): Because the Army Air Force forced them to-to join them.

NR: They forced them?

PB: They forced them to come and join with us.

OC: So, when they choose that Yolngu people, because they wanted to have them—to put them as their guide people. Because people can, you know, like, watch out, seen over day and night. So the Balanda they were following them. [PB and OC DISCUSSING] So they were chosen for reason. Because they had that Yolngu to Yolngu killing and they picked up from each clan all their leaders to involve them the war with Balanda. And also they had, they had to explain to them first where they taking them, why they collecting them for. To explain to them, to the person who was the person name? Raiwalla, eh? So he was the only person that he understands the English. So like, you know, like interpreter person when they, the force talk to him, telling him what’s going on. So he explain to the Yolngu people and that’s why Yolngu people they come to agreement and join in to the force.

NR: So they trusted Raiwalla?

OC: Yes, they trusted. So he-he explained to those people who are people, the boss people. Told them about the people that they no one really knows about their technique (Old Charlie, 2005).

Old Charlie later again uses the word “force” to describe the conditions under which Yolngu served. He asserts, “No. England people, like England, the army started ... They just forced them. They just joined in with them” (Old Charlie, 2005).

Although both Old Charlie and Phyllis Batumbil use the word “force” in the context of their family members’ decision to join Donald Thomson’s unit, the rest of their comments do not suggest any begrudging attitude towards Yolngu enlistment. Quite the contrary—their elaborations imply genuine support for Raiwalla’s recruitment efforts. To reconcile the two positions it would seem most likely that Raiwalla expressed the gravity of the wartime

situation. His grave characterisation may have made Yolngu feel as though they had no choice but to sign up for the war effort. Thus a better word to illustrate the conditions of Yolngu participation in this context would be coercion, rather than force or compulsion. The idea of Raiwalla coercing Yolngu support still problematises non-Indigenous portrayals of Yolngu partaking enthusiastically, but it does not adversely contradict such a narrative. If anything, the conflicting oral testimony promotes the role of Raiwalla as far more significant to the war effort than white sources suggest.

One significant role Yolngu played was to patrol Arnhem Land, which led to the rescue of several American and Australian airmen. One such famous story describes the rescue of American Lieutenant Clarence Sanford. Wandjuk Marika relays the story in detail as follows:

When we looked up again a second time we saw the man jump out by parachute and then Roy’s brother held my hand tightly and dragged me into the bush. But I said, “No, no, that’s the Balanda (white man) jumped from the plane by parachute, we go to look and try to find him”. And then we ran across through the bush to try to find this man and see whether he is alive or whether he is dead.

We went to another part of the island, a very long way across the bush, to the other side, east side of the island. As we were looking at the sea, that place was all calm, blue sea water. Roy’s brother said, “What that one there?” I looked and then I knew, “That’s the plane now, crash on the sea”. I said to him, “We have to keep walking along this beach and see if we can find somebody, whether he alive or whether he dead.” And then we walk along the beach until we find this man lying on the beach, on the edge of the water. He only have a singlet and shorts...

Then we walked face to face, he walking towards us and we walking towards him. I get ready to spear him, holding the fish spear above my shoulder, ready, and then I said to him, “Stop right there”, and he stopped right there.

And then I asked him, “Hey, can you tell us who you is? Australian or British or somebody else?” And he answer us right back, “I am Japanese.” So! I was ready to spear him with my fish spear, then he said, “No, no, no, no, I am an American.”

Otherwise I would have killed him with my spear, and then he would not have been able to talk.

Then I said, "OK, come towards me." And then he said, "I lose my plane. It drown right on the sea and I just been swim, maybe one mile or two." He was very lucky he landed on the shore safely, otherwise he would have died right there in the middle of the sea.

Ok, then I grab him and take him to camp where I was staying and feed him fish and turtle eggs...

Half way there, at Mount Dundas, or Djawulpa, I sent one of Roy's brothers to go and get shoes for him and also water and food because by this time he was very sick. I thought we were going to keep on going but he said to me, "OK Wandjuk – I'm so tired. You tricked me, you're going to take me to the Japanese camp."

And I said, "No, no, no we're not going to take you to the Japanese camp, we're taking you to the mission. We have just been on school holidays, and now I'm going to take you there so that the missionaries can look after you."

And he said to me, "I won't believe you." Sounds like he called me a "black bastard". But I didn't take any notice of what he was saying because he was so tired.

All his face, shoulder, feet were very burnt. I said, "OK, I'm still going to take you. It doesn't matter if you are saying bad words, swearing at me, I'll still take you along home to the mission." And he kept sitting, walking and sleeping maybe another three miles (Marika, 1995, pp. 65-67).

Marika's story is informative for its portrayal of non-Indigenous persons as well as Yolngu. Significantly, the American did not know whether or not Yolngu were allies in the war. His mistrust underscores the denigrating colonial attitudes plaguing settlers, and in this situation American allies of the settlers. From the Yolngu side the story demonstrates great courage and perseverance. Despite the hardships and despite the American pilot's crude comments and resistance, Marika and his friends stayed with the man to ensure he received help. They were also ready to kill him when they thought he was Japanese. In a different account of the same story, after meeting Sanford the Yolngu rescuers were still uncertain as to whether he was friend or foe. Only when they spotted a crucifix around Sanford's neck did they believe he was Balanda instead of Japanese (Thornell, 1986, pp. 129-133; See also *No bugles, no drums*, 1990). Thus their loyalty to local missionaries translated to disdain for Japanese and support for Australia's ally – the United States.

Analysis of a non-Indigenous account of another Yolngu rescue raises analogous issues. George Booth describes how he and two other R.A.A.F. soldiers survived a plane crash near Caledon Bay on 19 May 1942. Their initial reaction was fear that the local Aboriginal population engaged in cannibalism (*No bugles, no drums*, 1990). They determined that their best chance for survival would be to travel to the mission at Elcho Island (Booth, 1988, p. 22). After 25 days on their own through hardship and injury, the three men reached a Yolngu camp on Elcho Island. On day 26, an Aboriginal man named Matui came to their rescue. To convince Matui to take them to Milingimbi, Booth and his men offered trade goods upon arrival at Milingimbi. Booth writes:

"Paddy! You take us longa Milingimbi, we get you plenty good tucker, plenty good baccy! Look!" Frank showed Paddy a handful of coins.

Paddy's grin grew even wider. "Me takem, me got plenty canoe. Me catchem Milingimbi, plenty baccy!" (Booth, 1988, pp. 82-83).

Booth's narrative implies that Matui was greedy and begrudged assisting the soldiers. Considering the fact that other work of Yolngu went uncompensated, Booth probably misjudged Matui's motives. It is more likely that, given Matui's knowledge of the war, he was ready to assist Booth and his men regardless of payment. Booth's descriptions of Matui's strenuous efforts during the canoe journey demonstrate that Matui went above and beyond the call of duty. For instance, Booth remarks: "It was about twenty-five miles, and Paddy rowed the whole distance, some thirteen hours, and we arrived at Milingimbi at 10:00 at night, not far ahead of a rather unpleasant storm" (Booth, in *No bugles, no drums*, 1990; see also Booth, 1988, p. 103). Unfortunately, press coverage of the rescue in June 1942 overlooked the Yolngu role in Booth's rescue (Booth, 1988, p. 123). Even as this story of survival against the odds emerged during the war, the media reports essentially erased the integral Aboriginal role in the story.

Stories of Yolngu rescuing Americans and Australians highlight Yolngu goodwill towards Balanda amidst the continuing backdrop of settler colonialism. On a personal level, the rescue of allied soldiers broke down negative attitudes and stereotypes for those men who were fortunate enough to receive Yolngu assistance. The incidents themselves forced Balanda to confront their prejudices when they reacted aggressively or grudgingly towards Yolngu. Unfortunately, those individuals were neither influential enough nor numerous enough to challenge macro-structures of settler colonialism.

The most enriching information I came across for this paper was what Debra Bird Rose refers to

as "hidden histories" (Rose, 1991). These are oral stories which, while well-known in certain Aboriginal communities, have received little dissemination in the wider Australian community. These stories challenge the listeners' knowledge, confront non-Indigenous sources, and reveal remarkable situations from World War II.

The most noteworthy story is from Phyllis Batumbil, who describes defence measures at the Wessel Islands:

PB: Yeah. So, he was the first Yolngu throughout Arnhem Land knows how to handle a big machine because, you know, he was tall, solid, that's why the Balanda taught him that old man. His name's Gappa. They want him to be in charge. So, he was the-he was the Yolngu military to, uh, overseeing that the force. So, there were about four or five Yolngu going in with Balanda in Wessel. And he was the person, the only-he was the person that he was handling the machine gun firing at the Japanese.

NR: Why was he firing and not the Balanda?

PB: Huh?

NR: Why-why did the Balanda have him fire at Japanese instead of them firing at the Japanese?

PB: Well because, like, you know, Japanese can easily see Balanda. Down there, from above, because you know they-they put the spotlight headlights in the plane to see clear below. And Balanda they-hide themselves away and they put Yolngu outside because it's, you know, something that they won't see who's firing. Our skin, our colour, is too hard to see in the dark [CHUCKLE]. And that was surprise for them, for the Japanese, to see just only the firing of the gun and not the person [CHUCKLE] (Batumbil, 2005).

Batumbil's testimony presents a new picture of Yolngu work during the war. There is no mention in any non-Indigenous records of Yolngu people receiving weapons training, or of them firing on Japanese planes overhead. The notion of Balanda giving Aboriginal people guns is not isolated to Batumbil's story (see Willey, 1962, p. 8). In addition to oral testimony, another form of Aboriginal history-telling is through song and dance. A dance on Bathurst Island that commemorates World War II re-enacts Japanese planes overhead through arm movements. Then the dancers take long sticks and aim them at the sky. As they point at the sky, they motion as if the sticks were machineguns. Some singers mimic the sound of gunfire while others sing "The planes are coming! The planes are coming! Shoot them! Shoot them!" (No

bugles, no drums, 1990). More descriptions of guns also emerge in the oral testimony of Old Charlie of Mata Mata:

OC: ... No. But they teach them how to use the gun. It's bit hard for them to, you know, to throw spear at Japanese. Bit difficult for them, for Balanda. So, Balanda they teach Yolngu how to handle the gun, and how to fire with the gun.

NR: Did they teach-did he teach any Yolngu or was it only specific people?

PB: Huh?

NR: How to use the gun – did the Balanda teach, like, any Yolngu who were willing to learn or was it only designated for, you know, one or two or three or however many people?

OC: Whole of them.

NR: Really?

OC: So people then they learned, the young generations from the, because they learned first how to handle the gun.

NR: What happened to the guns when the war was over?

OC: They took it back. When the war here ... with the place whatsoever. When the war's over they took everything back.

NR: Were people upset or were they ok with that?

OC: They just wanted get rid of all those weapons back [PB CHUCKLES]. I'm thanking them. The big boss were thanking them people from Ramingining they all along the coast around to Glen Glen [?] way, Roper, Umbakumba. They followed with the Balanda, to keep them safe, because they got safe from by the protection of Yolngu people (Old Charlie, 2005).

The references to Balanda arming Yolngu beg the question as to why these and similar stories have not reached public domain. The most likely reason is that the idea of arming Yolngu contravened all military and colonial policies of Northern Territory circa World War II. Just the idea of Aboriginal soldiers contravened regulations against enlistment of persons "not of substantial European origin or descent" (NAA Canberra, series A2671, item 45/1940). Nonetheless, as historian Robert Hall has written, approximately 3,000 Aboriginal people and 850 Torres Strait Islanders ultimately served in World War II (Hall, 1997, p. 60).

Given the contemporaneous constructs of Yolngu as savages, it seems unlikely that white Australia would welcome news that soldiers were arming Yolngu.

This paper has presented only a snippet of the eclectic array of Yolngu histories of World War II. The different accounts reveal heterogeneity of personal motives to participate, but the collective sentiment points to their self-perception as allies of white Australia, rather than as subjects working for the armed forces. Testimonies suggest some elements of coercion involved in securing Yolngu assistance, but there is no indication that Yolngu veterans or their descendents resent white soldiers for procuring their support. Yolngu assistance was critical to rescue crashed American and Australian pilots. Oral histories of the war describe their participation as crucial in the white Australian/American victory over Japan. This position seems exaggerated when confronted with the wider events of World War II. Nonetheless, for those men who survived World War II because of their Yolngu saviours, it is quite clear that Yolngu were imperative allies in the war.

The oral testimonies in this paper also reveal holes that deserve further attention. For instance: What other technologies did Balanda introduce to Yolngu? How did Yolngu women participate in the war effort? What else have Balanda omitted from histories of World War II? One fundamental question for Balanda still deserves attention: Why are the stories in this paper—even those previously published—still on the periphery of white Australia's history of World War II? The Aboriginal testimonies expose a need for white Australia to re-examine existing histories of World War II and to find ways to incorporate, juxtapose, and reconcile the Indigenous and non-Indigenous narratives. One obvious reason for the disappearance of Aboriginal narratives from the war period was the fact that, fundamentally, the end of the war represented a continuation of the racist status quo. Aboriginal people did not receive recognition for their work, and as such their stories rapidly faded to insignificance. This paper presented only some pieces of the Yolngu history, and clearly there is a great deal more work to continue sharing Aboriginal histories of the war.

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