

THE FACTS ON THE WEST AUSTRALIAN NATIVES

The publisher of News Ltd., Mr. Rupert Murdoch, is leading an expedition of investigation into aboriginal conditions in Central, Western, and Northern Australia. A special aircraft is being used in this independent survey. Last night, after days of inquiry and personal observation in the Warburton and Rawlinson Ranges, WA, where the conditions of the natives were alleged to be pitiable, RUPERT MURDOCH flew into Alice Springs. Here is his first despatch . . .

Sick, starving natives — report is exaggeration

ALICE SPRINGS, Today: No aborigines in the Central Australian reserves are dying of thirst or starvation—or disease. The great nation-wide consternation for these people has not been necessary.

After several days and many hundreds of miles of travelling over this most remote of all country, and seeing at least two-thirds of its inhabitants, I say that these fine native people have never enjoyed better conditions.

White men's bores have meant more water than ever. Missionaries and others give hitherto-unheard-of medical attention, and no-one is allowed to starve.

The wide-spread consternation and horror caused by a report of a committee of West Australian Parliamentarians, and further statements attributed to their spokesman, Mr. W. Grayden, MLA, can only result in a further set-back to the

Charges were made that:

1. Many hundreds of natives were hopelessly short of food and water.
2. Mothers were killing their babies because of this famine.
3. Blindness and disease and shocking burns are commonplace, and immediate medical aid is necessary.
4. 250,000 acres had been grabbed by the Federal Government to establish a new weather station for so-called secret defence purposes on the southern slopes of the Rawlinson Ranges.
5. This station (known as Giles) causes all the native game to disappear, thus forcing the natives out of the Rawlinsons and into the desert to die of starvation and thirst.
6. Some months ago, a native was killed by one of the weathermen.

CHECKED, RECHECKED

The shame that every Australian felt over these charges was being repeated with increasing vehemence as late as a few days ago, making it all the more essential to establish their veracity.

I have spoken not only to the missionaries, geologists, weather men, local people, but many natives themselves and have checked and cross-checked and where possible checked again every one of these stories.

None of them can stand the light of full examination.

At the very most there are only 400 natives in this huge area stretching over thousands of square miles of vastly differing country. Much is desert but as much again is fair pastoral country, containing some of the most picturesque moun-

tains and gorges in Australia.

I have seen and spoken to most of these people—150 of them who had trekked 800 miles to the Musgrave Ranges on a corroboree walk-about, 40 at the Blackstone Range camp of a nickel prospecting company, 100 at the Warburton Mission itself and another 80 in the Rawlinson Ranges.

They are a happy lot, fine people, steeped in the knowledge of their proud history, and great lovers of their own land. They are obviously oblivious of the nation-wide concern for their reputed misery.

NOT ONE REALLY SICK

Not one really sick person did I see. All were obviously well fed and happy and at no place was there any chronic shortage of food.

It is true that a group of 40 natives (men, women, and children) came into the Warburton Mission from the desert in the far north-west late last year, about half of whom were in a very bad state indeed.

All were suffering from malnutrition and a few had severe yaws. Two of the women died—a young mother from pneumonia and a very old woman who was left behind with dropsy. The remainder went home again—where exactly, nobody knows.

MOTHERS DO KILL BABIES

But they were all cured and reasonably well fed again.

It is impossible to know if there are some people out there in the same condition—but a skilled anthropologist tells me that the number cannot be more than a handful and they would be almost impossible to find.

Mothers DO kill their babies sometimes—and

prompt appreciation of the very real problem of Australian aborigines.

The report itself was not only hopelessly exaggerated, but the statements in it were so careless in their handling of the facts that at some points the truth disappeared altogether.

almost always if they are twins but not when conditions are at their best—such as at the model Presbyterian Mission at Ernabella in SA.

The missionaries have found it impossible to make great headway against this native practice, especially when the second baby is taken away by the native midwife before it even breathes or the mother sees it.

LOVE THEIR CHILDREN

This is the only effective form of birth control and mothers never murder their children, whom they love and succor fully as much as white people.

Cases have occurred of small babies being killed by people in the tribe, but very rarely, and only for reasons of mythical significance unknown to white people.

Twins, say the ancient tribal laws, bring only bad fortune—hence their stillbirth. Experienced missionaries are fighting these customs every day with some limited success.

EYE DISEASE TREATED

They have nothing to do with any new or imaginary hardships, and no amount of refreshing food and water or medical supplies will make any difference.

I believe there is some incidence of trachoma, a type of curable eye disease, among the natives, but I saw only two cases.

Nothing, however, can be done to solve this problem.

The natives are treated for it properly when they come to the mission, but more often than not they go walk-about again before the cure is effected.

I saw no other diseases.

have always suffered much from burns, but nothing can be done to stop a man rolling into his camp fire in his sleep. I saw no cases of recent burns.

CASE WAS 10 YEARS OLD!

Mr. Grayden, writing in a WA newspaper about the Warburton natives in January, quoted the case of an old and totally blind man who crawled into a camp fire.

When missionaries found him, said Mr. Grayden, "he flesh had been burnt from his knees and elbows so the charred bones were protruding."

A SWIM TO REMEMBER

The Warburton missionaries who told Mr. Grayden this story assured me that this case actually happened, but it was at Ooldea, in SA more than 10 years or so ago!

Mr. Grayden also wrote that the waterholes between Warburton and the Rawlinsons are mostly dry and pitifully small even after the rain.

It is obvious that Mr. Grayden never went north of Warburton.

Although there was little rain since Mr. Grayden's inquiry, I saw a beautiful natural waterhole yesterday.

Combined with the fierce heat the fresh water was irresistible, and I soon found myself swimming about in the glorious, cool water of Mr. Grayden's "pathetically small dried-up waterhole."

The weather station at Giles covers nearly five acres, where the Commonwealth has appointed an extremely competent and sympathetic natives' protection officer.

He is Mr. Bob MacAulay, recently of the Sydney University, whose main job is to



RECENT PICTURE of a native group in the Rawlinson Ranges.

shield the natives from any contact with the 10 weather men.

No natural water has been used by the station. Before they kept tanks, the water from which is available to the natives, the water was brought 100 miles from Mount Davies, just inside the SA border.

Furthermore, there is plentiful natural game and the natives can go hunting kangaroos and emus within only 100 yards of the camp.

It has freely been stated that the 40 sick and starving natives who went to the Warburton Mission late last year were Rawlinson natives, forced out into the desert by the natives and the men of Giles.

'SHOT' MAN MUCH ALIVE

It was categorically stated by everybody on the area that not one of these 40 natives had even heard of the white men in the Rawlinsons.

Some months ago Mr. Grayden had much to say about the native reported to have been shot by one of the weather men.

This story is difficult to track down, but one thing is certain—the same native is roaming about the country today as large as life.

So much for the accuracy of the WA Parliamentary report and the statements attributed to Mr. Grayden and his supporters over the past few weeks.

But there is a grave danger in it, too.

TACKLE THE PROBLEM

Now that the immediate scare and worry over these people has been cleared up, it is just as important as ever that we must quickly and sensibly tackle the problem of our native population.

Although this problem is infinitely greater where contacts with white people have been more complete—not only on the pastoral properties in the Northern Territory and north-west of WA, but also in the back streets of all our big capital cities—it must not be forgotten that these people in the centre, the very last to establish contact with the white men, will more suddenly than ever be meeting white people.

Great companies like International Nickel of Canada are watching for and have prospects of finding some of the world's most vast min-

eral deposits in this very area.

If this comes to pass, action will have to be taken to protect these prime but totally unprepared people, and gradually set them up as fully self-supporting citizens capable of taking their place in the country as a whole.

Attention drawn to this problem by the ridiculous scare reported in Perth must be turned to good use.

IT WOULD BE A TRAGEDY IF EVERYBODY WERE TO SIGH WITH RELIEF AND RETURN TO THEIR PREVIOUS HAPPY SLEEP OF IGNORANCE.