

1860 Cogo Massacre Recalled

Mr. Pat Doyle, who will be 86 years of age this month, is one of the very few who is able to recall first-hand information of the early history of the Rollands Plains area where he has lived all his life. Possessing a retentive memory, Mr. Doyle likes nothing better than to talk of old times, and recently a representative of this paper enjoyed the opportunity of listening to some of his recollections of olden times.

Mr. Doyle vividly recalls possibly the most terrible massacre ever carried out in this district by aborigines. As a youngster, he knew one of those concerned, while in later years he memorised the details as they were actually told to his father by George Spokes, the only person to escape the premeditated murderous plans of a tribe of wandering natives. Following is the story as told, says Mr. Doyle, by Spokes himself:

We were pit sawyers, cutting cedar and beech; there were four of us: Barker, Lennox, Pocock and myself (Spokes). We were camped in a bark humpy near the Wilson River at Cogo. We were quite comfortable as bush camps go, doing our own cooking and washing and were happy in our work.

There were two bunks in the humpy and two men slept together in each bunk.

A bullock team was used for drawing logs to the pits.

A tribe of full-blooded aborigines roamed the countryside near to where we were working; when not hunting for food they were very interested in watching us at work, often spending many hours with us. As they showed friendliness we also took an interest in them, learning their language, and, in turn, teaching some of them to speak "pidgin" English.

The First Warning

All was going well until one day while the men were away hunting one of the women came to our camp with a warning . . . she told us that we were all going to be killed, and that if the men knew she had told us she would not live until sundown.

We treated the threat with a great deal of caution, first believing that the woman was romancing, but the news became somewhat more serious as she told us the plans . . . the tribe was going to set up camp on the opposite side of the river and "sing and play on the leaf," visiting us for two nights in this friendly fashion.

The third night, she said, they would be just as friendly, but would decide not to go back across the river to their camp, but to camp around our hut — then there would be a signal and we would all be killed. She added that it had even been arranged to set fire to the humpy so that other white men would think we had been burned to death in our sleep.

After the woman had gone, we talked it over; Barker and Pocock laughed at the woman's story pointing out how friendly the natives had always been, and were certain there was nothing to fear from the woman's warning.

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Lennox and I were not so sure, and thought about packing up and getting out. But we were swayed by the other two, and after arguing well into the night, finally agreed to stay.

"Sing and Play"

A few days later the tribe did arrive and camped on the other side of the river. I began to have some misgivings when the men came across and began to "sing and play the leaf" as the woman had said . . . but they showed no signs of hostility and were friendlier than ever.

The next night they came across again and repeated the performance but, try as we could, we could find no signs of unfriendliness and our fears were laughed away by Barker and Pocock. I suggested we clear out, but the majority ruled we stay.

The third night they came again and their outward friendliness gave me a guilty conscience for mistrusting them on the word of a woman.

We decided to turn in for the night, and our first misgivings came as we realised the tribe had not moved and, from the sounds, appeared to be going to bed down for the night close to our hut. As the night moved on, however, our fears were allayed, but as dawn was approaching one of the blacks came to the door of the hut and asked for a drink of water.

Signal for Attack

There was a bucket and a pannikin just inside the door, and Barker told him to help himself. He picked up the pannikin, but instead of drinking rattled it on the side of the bucket.

With this signal, they swarmed in and the slaughter began. They chopped at us with nulla nullas and waddies; my bedmate Lennox, tried to rise, but was smashed down under a rain of blows, falling across my body.

They kept on chopping and hacking, but poor Lennox took many of the blows aimed at me. Soon I was covered in blood, not so much from my own wounds, but from the terrible injuries that were inflicted on my mate. They must have thought I was dead, too, but Lennox's body had protected me from any serious blows.

Finally they left, and eventually I eased myself from under Lennox. I was saturated with his blood and must have been a terrible sight. The tribe were outside, and I heard one ask about "Boathera" (the nearest to Spokes) and the reply

came: "Boathera Bleela (dead), all bleela." Then they started to talk on how to set fire to the hut.

I knew it was now or never, and I had one possible advantage — there wasn't a man in the tribe could outrun me, if I could get a break.

I crept to the door and could see the tribe, mostly squatting down . . . I knew it had to be now . . . next thing I was racing for my life, and as my blood-stained form dashed between them, some fell over with momentary fright screaming "Debil-debil!"

RACE FOR LIFE

But the last man recognised me and yelled: "Boathera!" Then the chase was on!

I could hear their feet pounding behind me. A boomerang whirled past my ear, then another as I drew out of range. As I ran I had to decide which track to take in the dim light; I knew that on one of our bullock tracks a big tree had blown across it, but it was a short cut and I decided to take it.

Many Stumps

There were many stumps as we only cut them low enough for the bullock waggon wheels to clear. I steadied my pace approaching the tree, when one of the blacks came from the side, but he caught his foot on one of the stumps and fell. I speeded up and jumped clean over the fallen tree.

The sound of the chase died away, but I kept on to the nearest Rollands Plains settlement where I breathlessly told my story. A few settlers quickly mounted horses, and with their guns, set out for the hut.

When they got there, there wasn't a blackfellow in sight. Lennox and Parker were dead, but Pocock, although terribly mutilated, was standing up, his hands holding on to the top of the door, his blood stained head resting on his chest. He was mumbling, but they couldn't understand him, and as they lifted him back to the bunk, he breathed his last.

Word of the tragedy was passed around, and it was found the tribe was headed for the New England area. They were found, and their leader, "Terramidgee", was arrested.

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rested and brought to Port Macquarie. This man had a small, deformed foot, and his name meant "small at the earth" — "midgee" small and "terra" earth.

For his part in the massacre, he was tried, convicted, and hanged outside the Port Macquarie Gaol.

A FINE ATHLETE

After telling his story Mr. Doyle told the "Gazette" representative:

"I can remember Spokes as an old man, he wasn't very big, only about 5ft. 6in., but even then carried the mark of an athlete.

"I've heard my father

say that there wasn't a man in the district, black or white, that could pace Spokes in a footrace, and no-one could equal him in a high jump or long jump.

"He told my father that he had often tried to jump that tree that he had cleared that terrible night, but had failed."

"His son, John Spokes, lived in this district, married and reared a family of seven sons and four daughters, and lived to a grand old age."

Mr. Doyle added that three of the sons and two daughters are still living. — Hastings Shire "Gazette".

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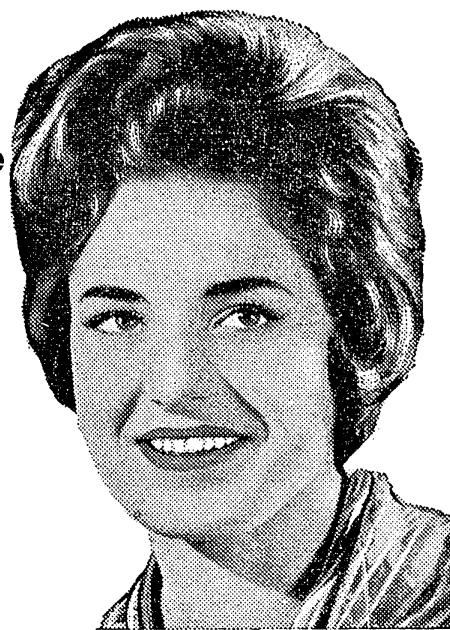
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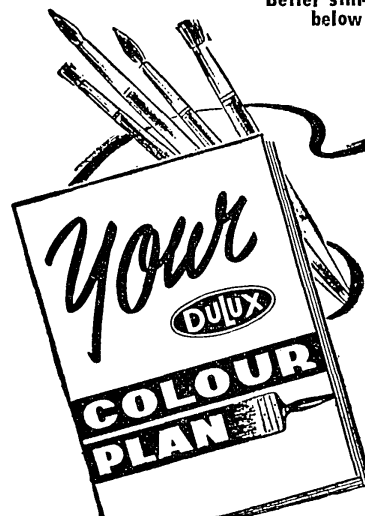
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