



2/1ST NORTH AUSTRALIA OBSERVER UNIT 1942-1945

THE NACKEROOS

During the Second World War the 2/1st North Australia Observer Unit guarded Northern Australia against Japanese incursions. This AIF unit established positions in remote areas and carried out patrols on foot and horseback, reporting back by wireless.

A similar role is now carried out by the North West Mobile Force (NORFORCE).

IN MEMORY OF THOSE WHO SERVED

Dedicated on 27 August 2008

PATROLS



'You always felt safe when you had an Aborigine with you. You knew that you wouldn't starve'

— Doc Harrison, NAOU attached to G Company

Patrols were essential to the NAOU's operations because the men had to gain the fundamental knowledge of the country around them. The war against the Japanese was overshadowed by the men's daily battle with the harsh environment. The patrols were often through unfamiliar and uncharted country. The Nackers with their Aboriginal guides, were largely preoccupied with the daily search for fresh water. On several early occasions men almost perished through lack of water.

Aboriginal people were employed for horse breaking and taming, clearing strips, collecting paper bark for hut construction and general labouring, but most importantly, they served as guides on reconnaissance patrols.

Their bush skills and efficient use of the environment were invaluable in helping the Nackers to survive. They taught the soldiers how to supplement their army rations with bush tucker. Without their knowledge and dedication, Stunner could not have operated a functional reconnaissance unit. Had the Japanese invaded the north, the Aboriginal guides would have played a key role in NAOU operations.

Source: Curtin's Cowboys, Australia's Secret Bush Commandos by Richard and Helen Waller

THE NACKEROOS



The North Australian Observation Unit (2/1st NAOU), affectionately known as the 'Nackeroos', was established by anthropologist Major W.E.H Stanner on 11 May 1942.

Major Stanner came up with the concept of a group of 'bush commandos' to watch over Northern Australia following the Japanese bombing of the Top End and the North West.

NAOU set up head quarters at Katherine. Companies were based on the Gregory, Roper and Ord Rivers. Their task was to patrol the northern coastal areas (usually on horseback) looking for signs of enemy activity, to man fixed coastwatch stations and to run a signals network for Northern Australia.

At its peak the Unit consisted of 550 men and employed 59 Aboriginal people.

Source: Curtin's Cowboys, Australia's Secret Bush Commandos by Richard and Helen Walker

"IT WAS SHEER HELL"

Somewhere in Australia

*Somewhere in Australia where the sun is a curse,
And each day is followed by another slightly worse,
And the brick red dust blows thicker than the shifting desert sand,
And the men dream and wish for a fair and greener land.*

*Somewhere in Australia where the mail is always late,
Where a Christmas card in April is considered up-to-date,
Where we never have a pay day and we never pay the rent
But we never miss the money 'cause we never get it spent.*

*Somewhere in Australia where the ants and lizards play,
And a hundred fresh mosquitoes reinforce the ones you slay,
So take me back to good old Sydney where I can hear the tramway bell,
For this god-forsaken place is just a substitute for hell?
(Credit illegible on provided file)*

The five month season of tropical downpours made roads impassible, the climate became oppressive and the sheer frustration overwhelmed everyone. Weather conditions could prevent every method of transport including truck, motorcycle, pack horse, ship or the occasional plane being used. It meant no supplies or mail for weeks on end.

In reality the Nackers were fully occupied just trying to survive their first wet in the north.

Source: *Curtin's Cowboys, Australia's Secret Bush Commandos* by Richard and Helen Walker

IN THE NEXT PHOTO, BELOW: a troop of horsemen of the North Australian Observer Unit (NAOU), crossing the Katherine River in the Northern Territory, led by an officer. The majority of the NAOU (known as Nackeroos) are skilled bush and horsemen. They are scattered all over the Northern Territory on guard against any surprise landings in isolated places. Many of the men have ridden over 2000 miles on horseback during the course of their patrols.



Five members of the North Australian Observer Unit (NAOU), pose with their rifles in the bush. The men are shirtless and wearing bandoliers across their chests. The men are identified only by their nicknames in an inscription on the verso: "Ray, Roy, Pet, Mac, and George hiding in the grass, shy with the women but plenty of dough-ray-me [sic]". Known colloquially as 'Nackeroos', the men of the NAOU were deployed in small groups throughout the rugged north of Australia, where they observed and reported on signs of enemy activity, often patrolling on horseback. Nackeroo operations were scaled down as the threat of Japanese invasion passed, and the unit was eventually disbanded in March 1945. (SEE BELOW):





Five members of the North Australian Observer Unit (NAOU), pose with their rifles in front of a shelter the men had built at Katherine in the Northern Territory. The men are identified only by their nicknames, from left to right: "Pet, Mac, Roy, Two-in-one, and George". Known colloquially as 'Nackeroos'.

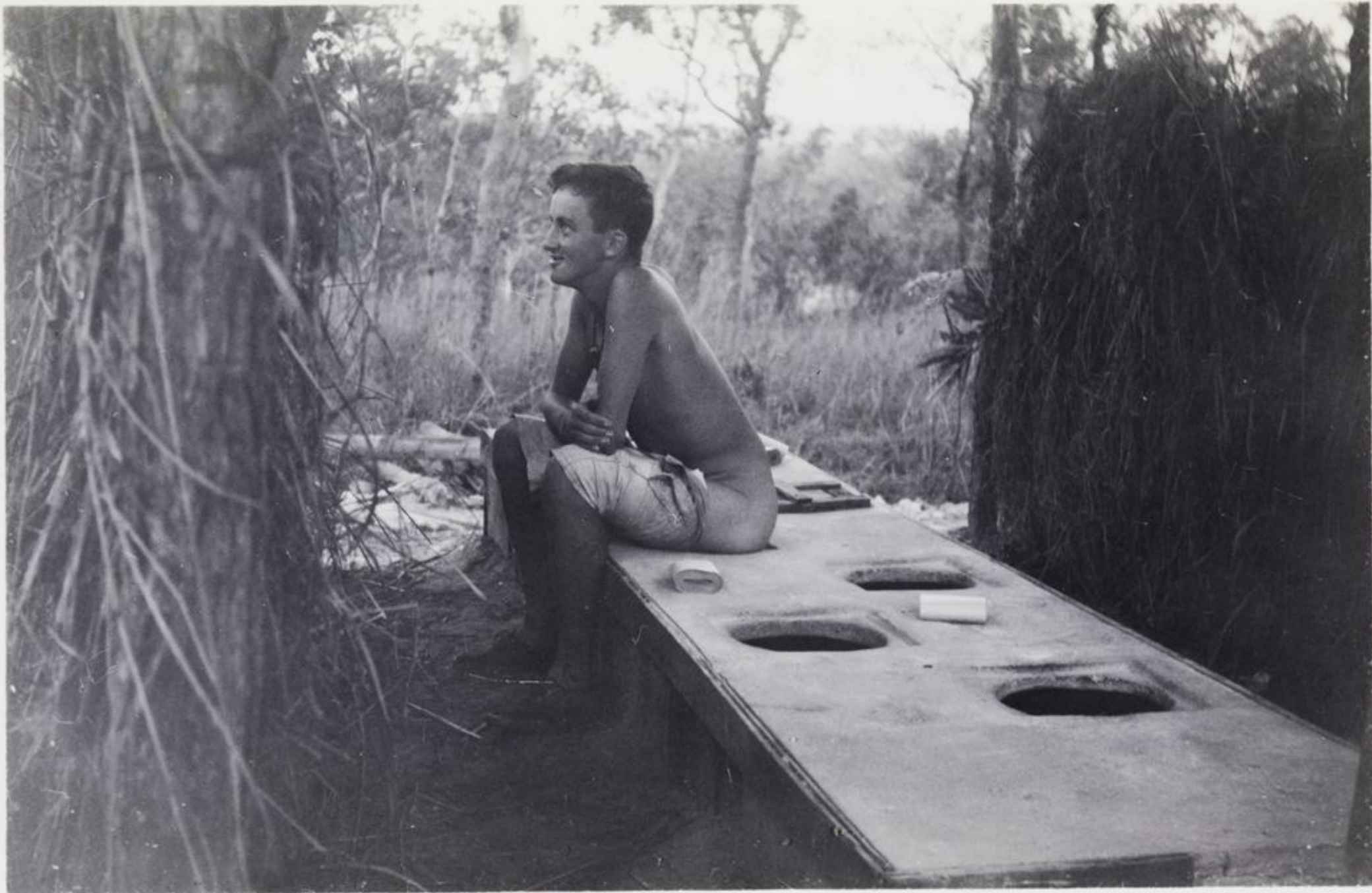
Pioneer Beach, NT. c. June 1943. Men of the 2/1st North Australia Observers Unit (NAOU), colloquially known as the Nackerroos at the camp at Bynoe Bay, west of Darwin. A rough shelter, perhaps a canteen or mess area is to the left constructed of rough hewn logs for poles and seats and sheets of bark for the roof. A larger tent with logs as poles and a tarpaulin over the roof is to the right. The water of the bay is in the distance beyond the trees. (SEE NEXT PHOTO):







**WORKING AND
LIVING IN THE
BUSH WAS
VERY
PRIMITIVE**





Probably Katherine, NT. 1943. Two members of the 2/1st North Australia Observers Unit (NAOU) return from killing a bullock with some meat carried in a portion of the hide from the animal, rifles slung over their shoulders. 2242912 Corporal (Cpl) Theo (Tip) Carty (left) of NSW and Private Bill Warburton of Vic had tracked the animal for three hours. Cpl Carty, wearing his Speedo swimming costume, has a tomahawk on his left hip, and holes in his hat for ventilation as he suffered from prickly heat. (Donor T. Carty)



REPAIRING TELEPHONE WIRES



The best horsemen and horsebreakers of the 2/1st North Australia Observers Unit (NAOU) mounted on their horses tidy up their parade ground drill before the inspection by General ? of the local brumbies and Northern Territory horses purchased by the Army for the 300-400 mile patrols carried out by the NAOU.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

**From left to right:
unknown, Bluey Campbell
of Moree, NSW; 4400057
William Richard (Bill)
Kennewell; Sergeant
Tommy Martin, farrier;
Corporal Bill Baunach, NT
champion lightweight
boxer; Karl Fredrickson of
Vic; Tony Kenyon,
formerly of the Northern
Territory Mounted Police.**



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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Pioneer Beach, NT. 28 June 1943 or 6 June 1943. Men of the 2/1st North Australia Observers Unit (NAOU), colloquially known as the Nackerroos came to the assistance of the pilot of Spitfire A58-467 which landed on the beach at Bynoe Bay, west of Darwin, after suffering engine trouble during a dog fight. From left to right: Flight Lieutenant C. C. (Clyde) 'Flying Doctor' Fenton who came in with a battery after the NAOU radioed for help; 400992 Flight Lieutenant (Ft Lt) Leeming, pilot of the plane and Sergeant Knight, 2/1st North Australia Observers Unit, a carpenter in civilian life. It was necessary to get the Spitfire off before the tide came in. Ft Lt Leeming was later killed in action on 18 January 1945 in Morotai. (Donor T. Carty)



Pioneer Beach,
NT. c. June 1943.
Horses of the
2/1st North
Australia
Observers Unit
(NAOU) at the
horse camp at
Bynoe Bay, west
of Darwin.



Probably , NT. c. June 1943. Informal group portrait of men of the 2/1st North Australia Observers Unit (NAOU) watching Private Clem Muldoon cutting open a bullock carcass with an axe. In this group are Major White, MC, MM, Croix de Guerre; Commanding Officer, Captain Bill Travers (back row, second from right) who won a Military Medal in Tarakan; Corporal Inky Ferguson, MM, an Aboriginal serviceman; Captain Romney Cole MC (back row right) and his brother Lieutenant Neville Cole (bottom row right), ? Muldoon, brother of Clem (front row, third from right). (Donor T. Carty)



Members (IN NEXT PHOTO) of the 2/1st North Australia Observers Unit (NAOU) stand at ease, rifles held to the ground, taken shortly after their arrival in the Northern Territory. From left to right: Jack Williams of SA, Cliff Rowe of Vic, Bob Emmett of SA, Alf Townsend of SA and 2/242912 Corporal Theo (Tip) Carty of NSW. Inscribed on the back of the photograph is "Captain Dave Herbert, ex Xaviers brother, was court martialled for selling troop rations. Cliff Rowe was tied to mast by Dave Herbert for refusing an order".



**Katherine, NT. 1942.
Informal portrait of
2/242912 Corporal
(Cpl) Theo (Tip) Carty
of NSW, 2/1st North
Australia Observers
Unit (NAOU),
colloquially known as
the Nackeroos. Cpl
Carty is wearing a
bandolier over his
shoulder and his hat
is held in his hand.**

(Donor T. Carty)



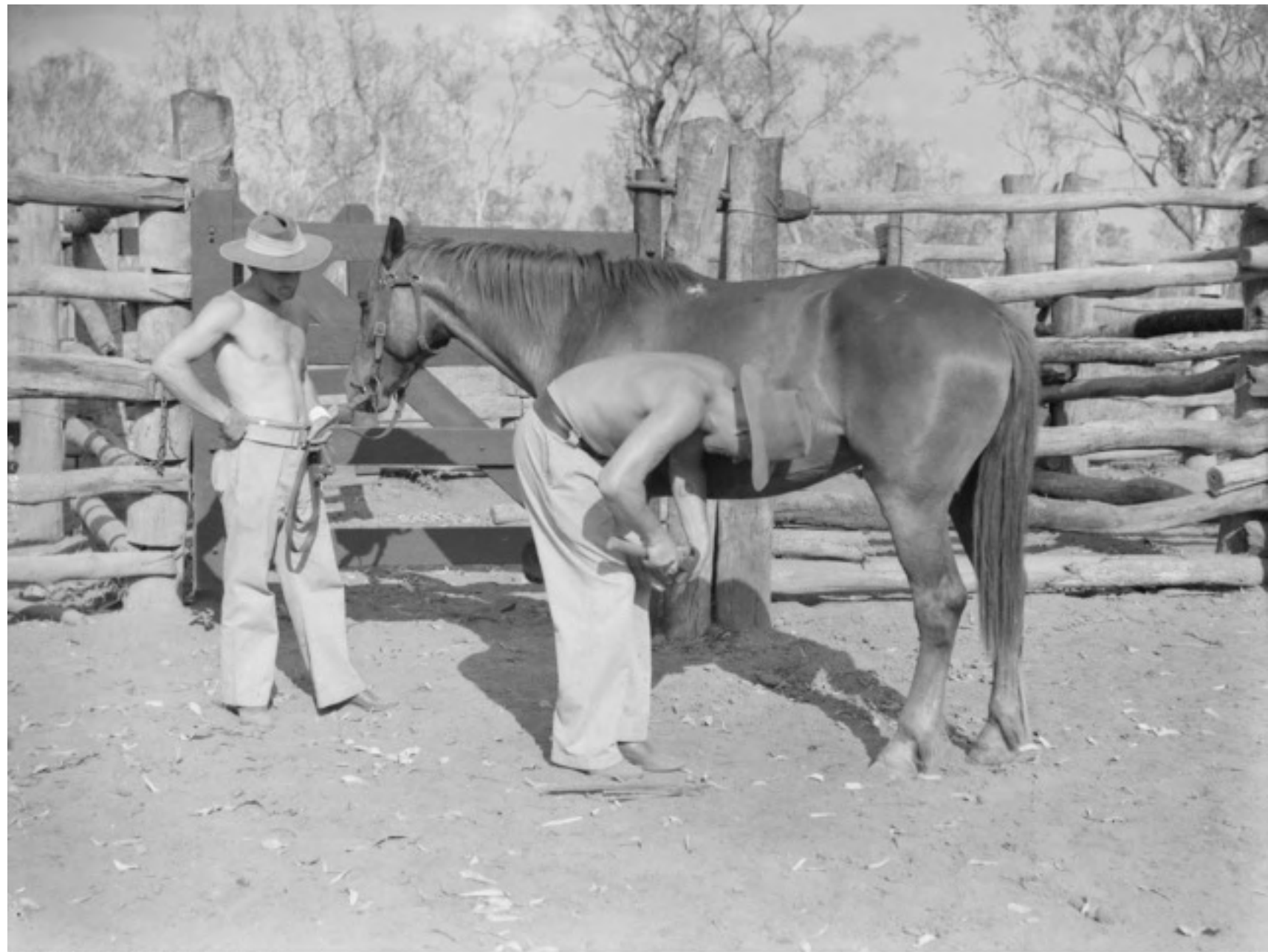


KATHERINE, NT. 1943-09-29. A REMOUNT BEING TRAINED BY SX15477 LANCE CORPORAL G. DOUGLAS OF THE NORTH AUSTRALIAN OBSERVER UNIT, NORTHERN TERRITORY FORCE. OTHER MEMBERS OF THE UNIT, SEATED ON THE FENCE RAIL. LEFT TO RIGHT:- QX16605 LANCE CORPORAL W. BAUNACH; SX20603 SERGEANT W. L. LAVINGTON; NX161010 PRIVATE C. BRANN.

**KATHERINE, NT.
1943-09-29. A
YOUNG UNBROKEN
HORSE OF THE
NORTH
AUSTRALIAN
OBSERVER UNIT
BEING HELD DOWN
BY QX16605 LANCE
CORPORAL W.
BAUNACH WHILE
SX20603 SERGEANT
W. L. LAVINGTON
FITS A SHOE.**



**KATHERINE, NT. 1943-
09-29. QX16605 LANCE
CORPORAL W.
BAUNACH HOLDS THE
HORSE WHILE SX20603
SERGEANT W. L.
LAVINGTON FITS A
NEW SHOE AT
HEADQUARTERS,
NORTH AUSTRALIAN
OBSERVER UNIT,
NORTHERN TERRITORY
FORCE.**



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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KATHERINE, NT. 1943-09-29. RATION AND MAIL BUGGY OF THE NORTH AUSTRALIAN OBSERVER UNIT.



KATHERINE, NT. 1943-09-29. RATION AND MAIL BUGGY OF THE NORTH AUSTRALIAN OBSERVER UNIT. SHOWN ARE:- DX766 LANCE CORPORAL A.S. KENYON (1). NX56990 CAPTAIN C.S. FLEETING (2).



**KATHERINE, NT. 1943-09-29.
SX20603 SERGEANT W. L.
LAVINGTON OF THE NORTH
AUSTRALIAN OBSERVER UNIT,
NORTHERN TERRITORY FORCE,
BREAKING A MARE TO THE
SADDLE, FOR THE USE OF THE
UNIT'S PERSONNEL. THE
NORTH AUSTRALIAN
OBSERVER UNIT CONSISTS OF
EXPERT BUSHMEN WHOSE
JOB IS TO LOCATE CRASHED
AIRCRAFT IN THE ROUGH AND
RUGGED COUNTRY OF
NORTHERN AUSTRALIA.**



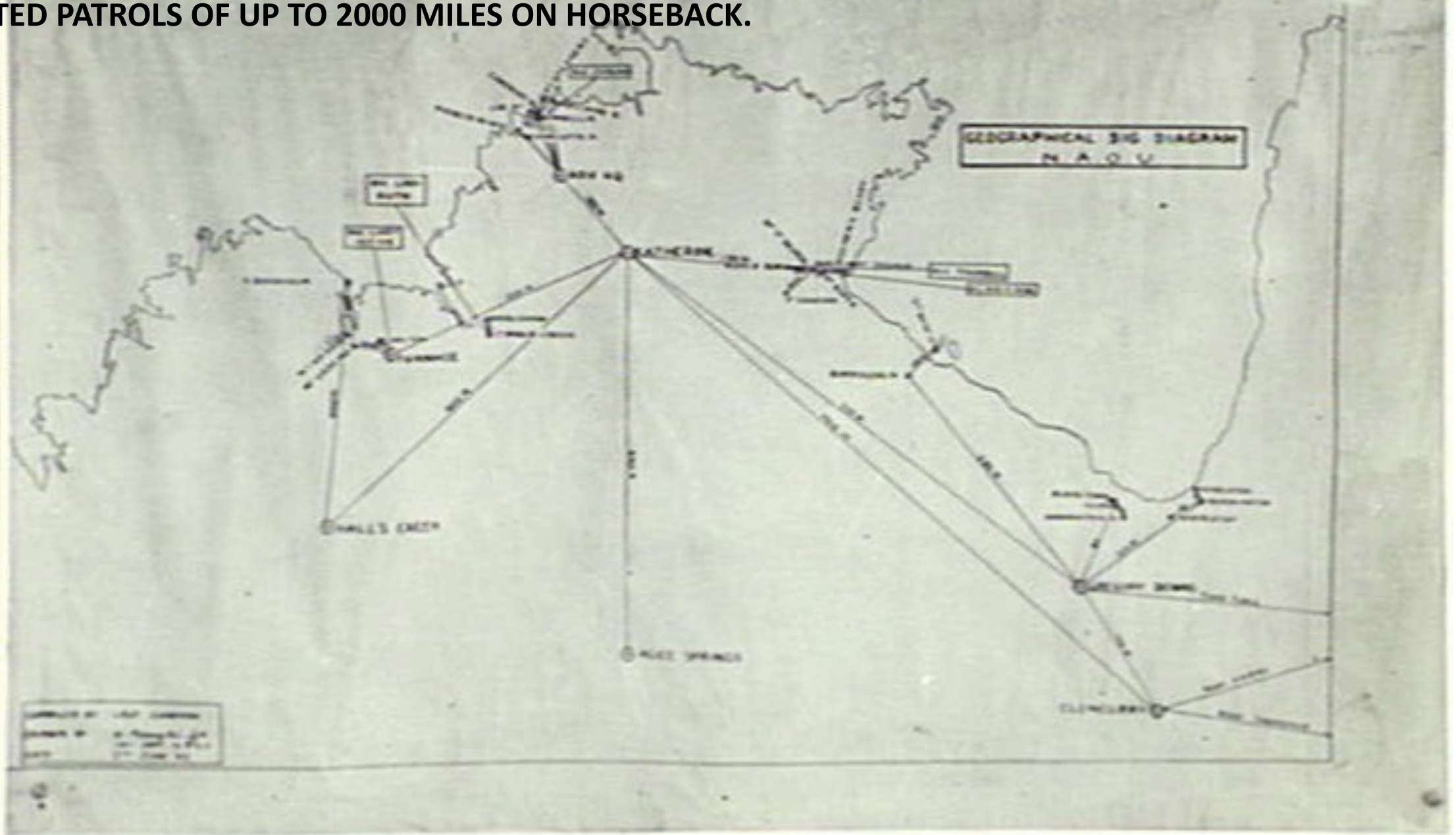


KATHERINE RIVER, NT. 1943-10-12. A PORTABLE WIRELESS TELEPHONE SET CARRIED ON HORSEBACK BY THE PATROLMEN OF THE NORTH AUSTRALIAN OBSERVER UNIT.



**KATHERINE RIVER, NT. C. 1943-10-4. A TROOPER
OF THE NORTH AUSTRALIAN OBSERVER UNIT, ON
HORSEBACK GALLOPING THROUGH LIGHT SCRUB.**

KATHERINE RIVER, NT. 1943-10-12. MAP OF THE LOCALITIES PATROLLED BY THE PERSONNEL OF THE NORTH AUSTRALIAN OBSERVER UNIT. THESE MEN ARE SKILLED HORSEMEN AND BUSHMEN WHO HAVE, AT TIMES, COMPLETED PATROLS OF UP TO 2000 MILES ON HORSEBACK.



**KATHERINE RIVER, NT.
1943-10-12. NX4376
LIEUTENANT S.
CHAPMAN, SIGNALS
OFFICER OF THE
NORTH AUSTRALIAN
OBSERVER UNIT
SHOWING ONE OF THE
UNIT'S PORTABLE
WIRELESS TELEPHONE
SETS LOADED ON TO
PACKHORSES.**



**A TROOP
OF
HORSEMEN
OF THE
NORTH
AUSTRALIA
N
OBSERVER
UNIT,
CROSSING
THE
KATHERINE
RIVER.**



Nackeroo Camp

**KATHERINE
RIVER, NT.
1943-10-01 TO
1943-10-08.
CAMP
COOKHOUSE
OF THE NORTH
AUSTRALIAN
OBSERVER
UNIT
AMONGST THE
TREES.**



KATHERINE RIVER, NT. 1943-10-01 TO 1943-10-08. MEN AND HORSES OF THE NORTH AUSTRALIAN OBSERVER UNIT, ENJOYING A LUNCHTIME DIP IN THE RIVER.



**SERGEANT J. MARSHALL OF THE NORTH AUSTRALIAN
OBSERVER UNIT, PREPARING TO FIRE A SMOKE GRENADE.**



**TROOPERS OF THE NORTH AUSTRALIAN OBSERVER UNIT,
BEING TRAINED TO SWIM ACROSS A RIVER WITH THEIR GEAR.**



**TROOPERS OF THE NORTH AUSTRALIAN OBSERVER
UNIT, BEING TRAINED TO SWIM ACROSS THE RIVER
WITH THEIR GEAR.**



**TROOPERS OF THE
NORTH AUSTRALIAN
OBSERVER UNIT
ENJOY A DIP IN THE
KATHERINE GORGE,
AT THE END OF THE
DAY.**



**TROOPERS OF
THE NORTH
AUSTRALIAN
OBSERVER UNIT,
BEING TRAINED
TO SWIM
ACROSS A RIVER
WITH THEIR
GEAR.**



**TROOPERS OF THE NORTH AUSTRALIAN OBSERVER UNIT,
TRAINING THEIR HORSES TO MOVE THROUGH A
SMOKESCREEN.**



**TROOPERS OF THE NORTH AUSTRALIAN OBSERVER
UNIT WATERING THEIR HORSES. SHOWN ARE-
CORPORAL CORLIS (1); LIEUTENANT N. DOYLE (2).**



**TROOPERS OF
THE NORTH
AUSTRALIAN
OBSERVER UNIT
WATERING
THEIR HORSES
IN THE RIVER.
SHOWN ARE:-
PRIVATE GALLI
(1); CORPORAL
FLOOD (2).**





TROOPERS OF THE NORTH AUSTRALIAN OBSERVER UNIT ON THEIR MORNING PARADE ON HORSEBACK. SHOWN ARE:- CORPORAL (CPL) H.R. WOOD (1); CPL DAVIS (2); PRIVATE (PTE) WILSON (3); CPL CONNORS (4); CPL DAVOREN (5); CPL TEMPLETON (6); PTE RODDICK (7); PTE GALLI (8).



MARCHING OFF THE MORNING PARADE.



**VIEW OF THE RIVER BANKS OF THE
KATHERINE RIVER SHOWING THE
TYPE OF COUNTRY WHICH THE
TROOPERS OF THE NORTH
AUSTRALIAN OBSERVER UNIT HAVE
TO PATROL ON HORSEBACK.**





Portrait of NX83162 Private Jeffrey St Clair Oldrey, a member of the North Australian Observer Unit (NAOU), in uniform outside a tent in the Northern Territory. Known colloquially as 'Nackeroos', the men of the NAOU were deployed in small groups throughout the rugged north of Australia, where they observed and reported on signs of enemy activity, often patrolling on horseback. Nackerroo operations were scaled down as the threat of Japanese invasion passed, and the unit was eventually disbanded in March 1945.



**SHARK
CAUGHT OFF
THE COAST.**



PREPARING A FISH TRAP



**SLING
SHOT
PRACTICE**





TERMITE MOUND

**TERMITE MOUND IN
BUSH COUNTRY**





ON LOOKOUT









THE NACKAROOS GROUP PORTRAIT



CURTIN'S COWBOYS

AUSTRALIA'S SECRET
BUSH COMMANDOS



RICHARD WALKER & HELEN WALKER





**ADF RECREATES
NACAROOS RIDE**