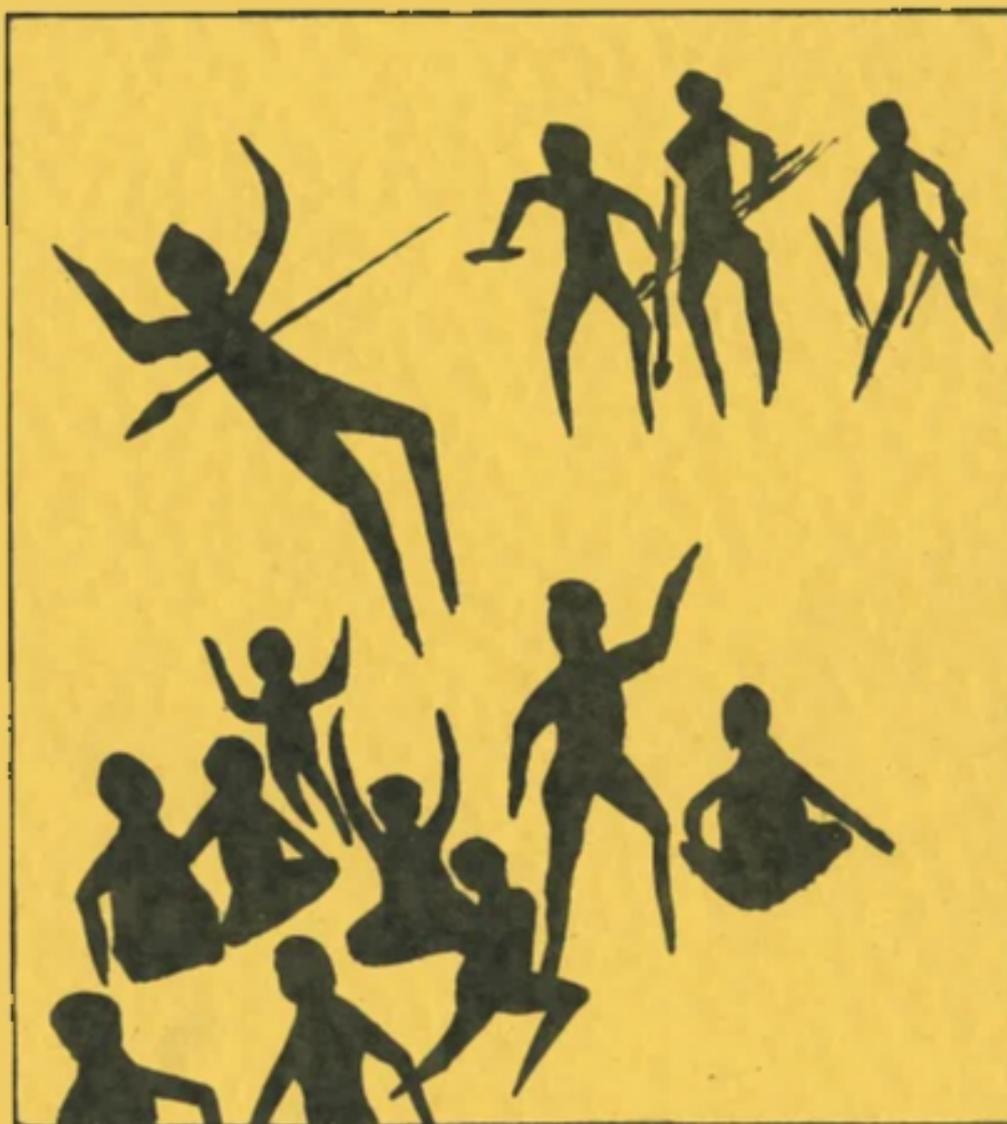


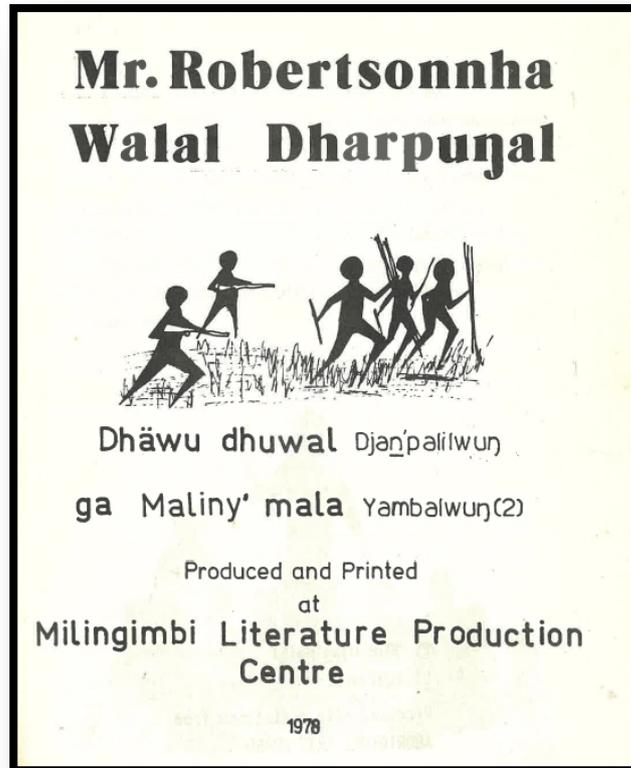
Mr Robertson was Speared



Told by Djan'palil Illustrations by Yambal
Translated by Warren Warrkmanydjun & Samuel

The original story that is here translated, was told as part of a school project to collect stories that students would read in their own languages. The stories were told by elders of the time, then transcribed and illustrated by workers in what is now known as the Literature Production Centre (LPC). The illustrations and the covers of the books have been retained with very little changed to keep the sense of the original works – printed on a Gestetner machine, hand stapled and bound.

Original title page:



They Speared Mr Robertson



Told by Djan'palil

Language: Liyagalawumirr

Illustrations by Yambal

Original book produced with the assistance of the Aboriginal Arts Board
1978

Translated by

Warren Warrkmanydjun & Samuel White

Reproduced at Milingimbi LPC



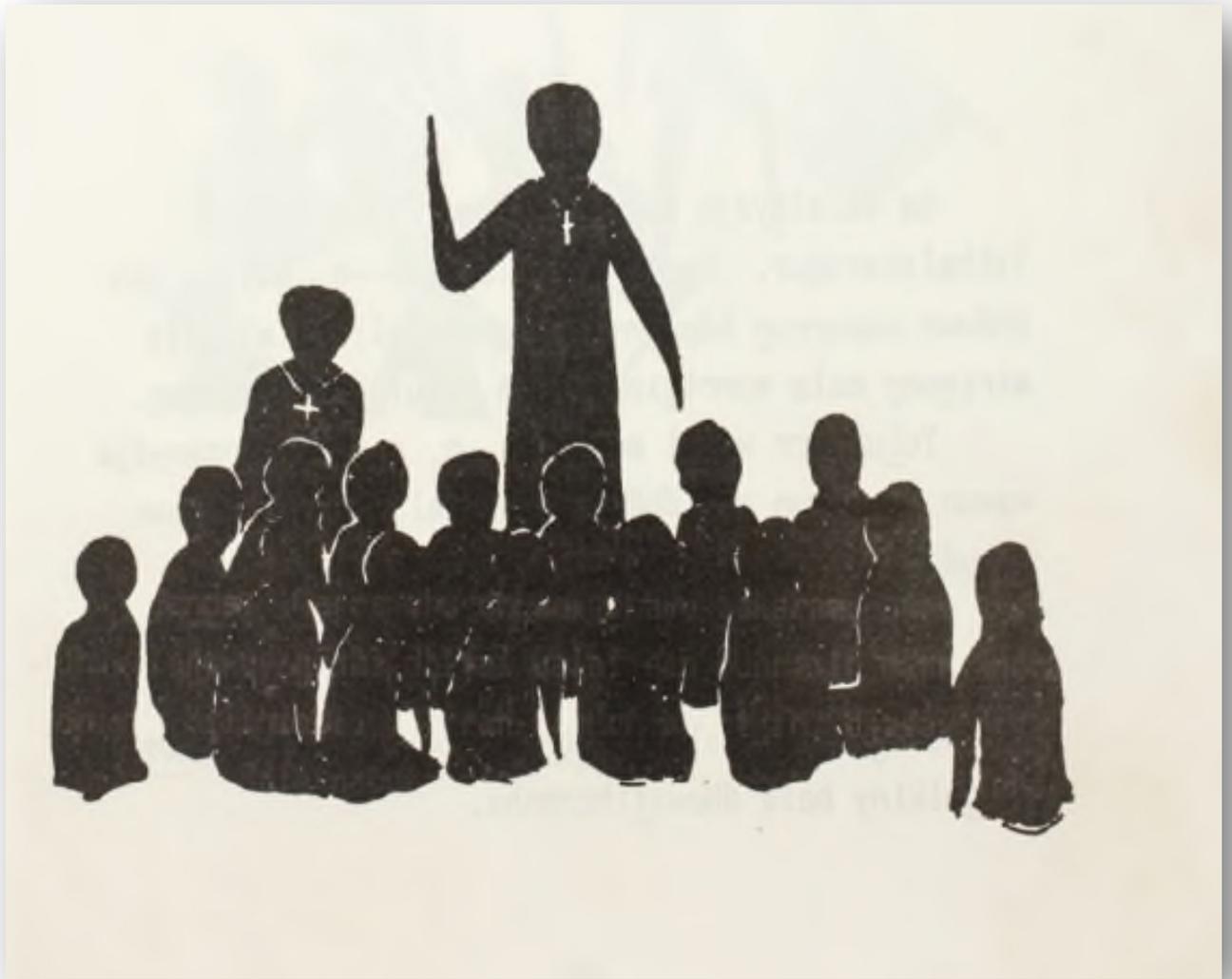
2025

*Maṇḍa!*¹ I will tell you a story about what happened here when people fought with guns, here at *Miliṇinbi*.²

We slept right through and as Sunday morning dawned we got up, had a wash and got dressed. Then we started heading for the church, for morning service. Mr Robertson got there early and was waiting for us. He waited until we all arrived, and then the service started.

¹ *Maṇḍa* means two people, here referring to the two who are listening to the story.

² *Miliṇinbi* is now known as Milingimbi.





As he read the good news from the scriptures the enemy began closing in on us, but we were unaware of them. They had travelled all the way from Yathalamara on the mainland.³ They surrounded the church, creeping closer and closer, the minister continued his sermon and still we sat unknowing.

³Yathalamara is a homeland community close to Ramingingin.



They got up, and one of the men speared Mr Robertson. We panicked, all of us. Once the spear-wielding warriors had struck him, they all ran off. And that was it.



Some of the local men – Lārri, Yilkari, and Boti, also Ginygaḍam, they picked up guns and took off after those *moṇu'muṇuṇu*.⁴ Those men from Miliṇinbi were all L̄iya-galawumirr men, from my clan.

⁴ *Moṇu'muṇuṇu* – here meaning the perpetrators.



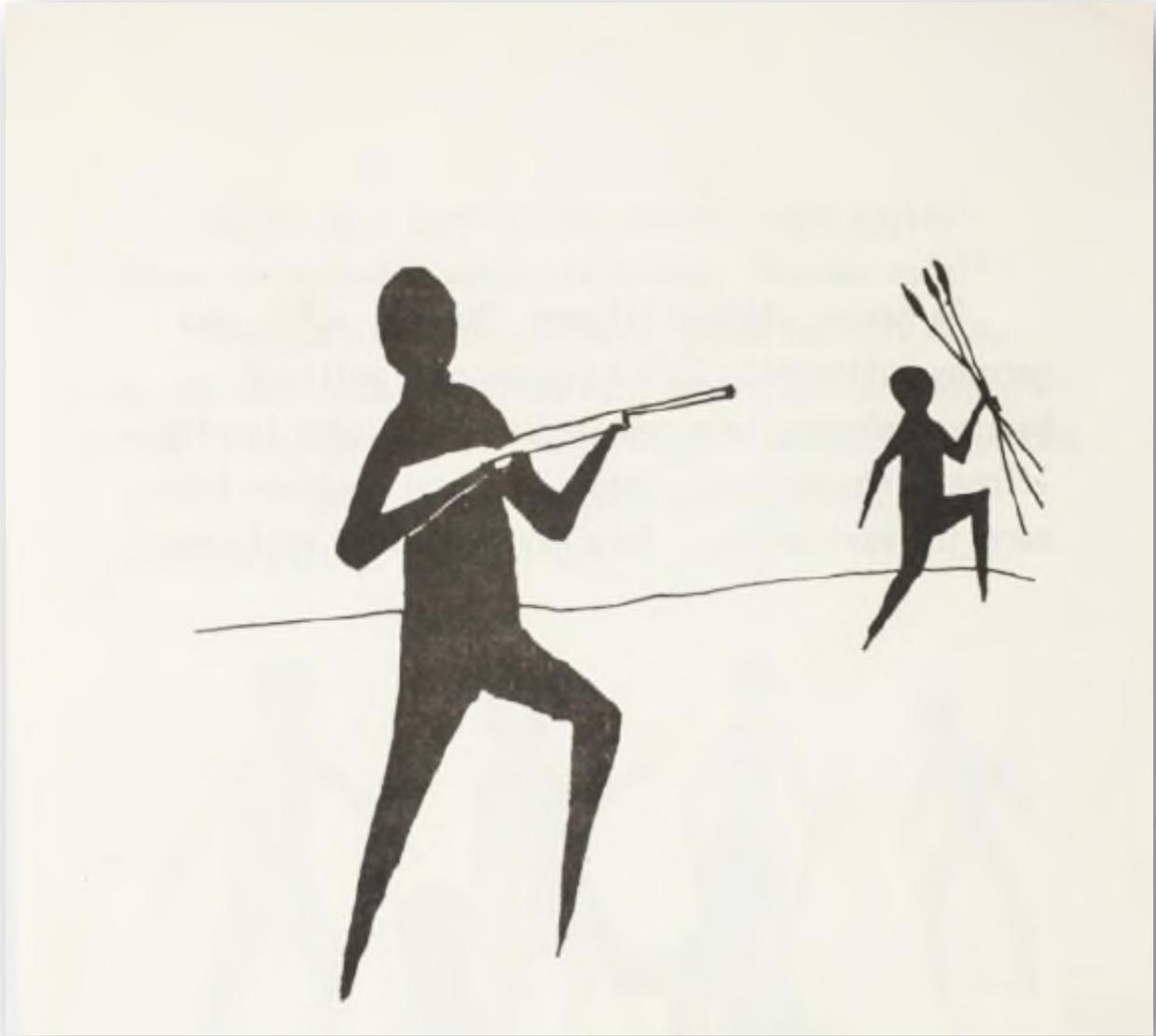
Carrying the guns they chased after the men with the spears, chased them past the school and across the floodplains, on they ran.⁵

⁵ Part of the storytelling style is lost in translation - at certain points a stylistic device is used where the last vowel sound of a word is extended for several beats. This has the effect of pulling the audience in, making the story more engaging.

My fathers went after them; they were heading towards the mangroves over at Djerrgi⁶. The fighters were hiding in the mangroves and the men fired towards them. *Diy, diy, diy!* Into the water they went and began to swim towards the mainland.



⁶ In the Yolŋu relationship system fathers and father's brothers are all called 'father'. Djerrgi is an area on the coast of Milingimbi, near the mangroves and looking towards the mainland.



But there was one man who had nowhere to run, he was hiding in the mangroves. Lārri, my father, tracked his footprints, they belonged to a man named Makani, he had tired from running and was resting in the thicket of the mangrove forest.

Ok, so Lārri followed those tracks and saw him hiding, “there you are!” he shouted and began to attack him.

Makani cried out, “*Waku*, don't hit me”, but L̄arri still gave him a good hiding.⁷ *Yän bili---**i*, and so, then he escaped and ran into the mangroves, and from there swam across to the mainland.⁸

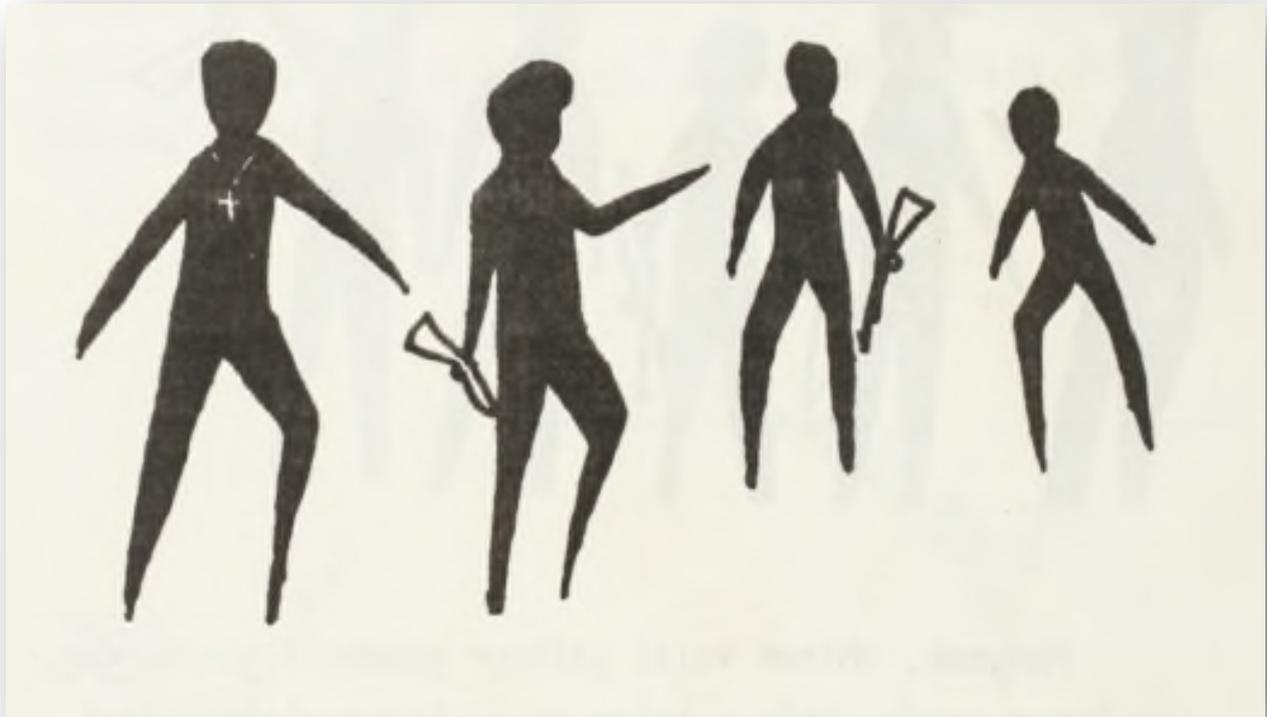
And L̄arri returned to the church.



⁷ *Waku* is the term used for a female's children or a male sister's children, but here references a more distant relationship as kinship terms are cyclic.

⁸ This is the storytelling technique referred to in footnote 5, where the final vowel sound of the word is extended, here showing how it is written to help readers use the expression of a storyteller.

When he returned Mr Webb asked, “where are they?”⁹ Lārri replied, “they’re gone, there was one man I nearly caught, but he got away from me. He ran off and then swam across to the mainland.”



The minister expressed his disappointment, “*Yaw!*” and then said, “there will be police arriving in the morning about this trouble. I need all of you - Dorrŋ, Yilkari, Ginygaḍam and you to go with the police, and Birrinydjawuy as well.”¹⁰

⁹ Mr Webb was one of the ministers, also at the church during the attack.

¹⁰ Birrinydjawuy went with the police as an interpreter.



All those men sat and waited for the police to arrive. When they had, they all travelled over to the mainland in a canoe. Wandhawarri was waiting for them, and he took them all to a place called Wolḡir.¹¹ It was there the three offenders were staying. When they arrived, the police said to them, “ok, let's go! All of you are coming with us. You will face justice for what you have done. The boat *McBride* is coming for us.”¹²

¹¹ Wandhawarri was a contractor working on the roads, who was from Milingimbi.

¹² The question of what justice is explored in accounts written at the time. Links are included at the end of this story.

The perpetrators all got up and went with them. One of the men, called Rirrṅanydjun, was part of the group. That's Biranbirrilili's father.¹³ It was his spear that struck Mr Robertson. They all agreed to go with the policemen. “Yuw! Let's all go”, they said.



Off they went, the policemen and the prisoners, to Dhäbiḷa.¹⁴ There were two canoes waiting to take them across to the island, Miliṅinbi.

¹³ Remember this story is being told for children that are all connected to the people in this story.

¹⁴ A river that pours out into the waterway between Milingimbi and the mainland, and the land surrounding where transit to Milingimbi occurs.

Ok, so off they went and paddled towards us, they arrived here landing near the store. They jumped from the boat, and we watched them walking towards the store. We said to each other, "*Way!* They're already tied up".¹⁵

They stayed overnight in Miliŋinbi and awoke at dawn. Then they waited for the boat *McBride* to arrive from Darwin; it came in the afternoon. First cargo was unloaded for us here at Miliŋinbi, and then the prisoners and the policemen motored away towards Darwin.



¹⁵ *Way!* Is here used an expression of surprise.

Mr Robertsonha Walal Dharpuṅal

Original Text

p. 4 Maṅḁa! Ṇarra dhu dhuwal dhäwu ḁakaram, dhuwalaṅuwuy ṅunhi dhiyal walal gan bunhamin märryaṅdhu; dhiyal Miliṅinbi. Ṇorran napurr marrtjin, djaḁaw' Sunday. Bala napurr marrtjin ḁupthurrnha biryalilnha. ḁupthurr napu---rr, bilin. Bala napurr marrtjin wäṅgaṅalṅnha. Ṇayiny ṅäthilnha Bäpa Mr Robertson-dja, bala gan galkurrnha napurruṅ. Ga bäy napurr bukmakthin, bala ṅayi napurruṅ ṅurru-djirr'yurrnha dhäwuny ḁakaraṅalṅnha.

p. 5 Ga walalnydja miriṅu gan marrtjin beṅur Yathalamaraṅur. Marrtjin walal ga---n, ṅayiny gan dhäwun napurruṅ bäpaynydja ḁakaraṅal; walalnydja miriṅuny mala marrtjin galkin yuḁutjurr napurruṅ.

Yuḁutjurr walal marrtji---n, ṅayiny bäpaynydja wawun napurruṅ gan dhäwu ḁakaraṅal; ga napurr gan wawudhi nhina'nhinan.

ḁakaraṅal napurruṅ ṅayi marrtji---n, walalnydja miriṅunydydja mala napurruny ḁiw'maraṅalṅnha ga ḁiw'maraṅalṅnha; bala marrtjin yuḁutjurrnha napurruṅ; ga galkiny bala dhawaṅṅthurrnha.

p. 6 Bala walal dharpuṅalṅnha bäpanhany garaynha. Bäy napurr gan baba'yurr. Bilin. Ṇunhi walal dharpuṅalnydja ṅanya, bala walalnydja moṅu'muṅuṅuny waṅḁi'waṅḁinan barrariṅun.

p. 7 Ga walalnydja yolṅu'yulṅuy, walal ḁärriy, ga Yilkariy, ga Botiynydydja märryaṅnha märra'marraṅal, ga Ginygaḁamdhun. (Ṇarrakal yän ḁiya-galawumirriy malay.) Bala walal ṅuparnha walalany ṅunhiwurruny yolṅu'yulṅany mala ṅunhi moṅu'muṅuṅunhany.

p. 8 Bumarnha walalany walal marrtji---n, ṅuparnha---a. Ṇuparnha bitjarr märryaṅdhun walalany bumar. Dhuwalatjanan walalany walal gan ṅupar wukirriwurrnha, ga dhiyal gurripuluṅur walal dhawaṅṅthurr; bala walal waṅḁinan ṅunhi moṅu'muṅuṅuny mala.

p.9 Ga ṅarrakuny mala bāpa'mirriṅu marrtjinany, ga ṅunhan walalaṅ gungaṅal Djerrgin; bala walal maṅṅ'maraṅalṅha walalany, bala walalany walal gan bumarnha bala ṅarrtha'lilṅha. Diy, diy, diy! Walalanydja gan waṅṅi---n, bala gārrin ṅarrtha'lilṅha barrariṅuny. Gapukurrnha nhā walal marrtjin bulyurr. ṅunhi djinaga moṅukurrnha.

p.10 Ga ṅayiny waṅganydhu mālu'y, ṅayi mak ṅārriy, waṅṅin ṅayi---i, ṅuku-ṅupa'ṅupa---r waṅganyṅha yoṅṅuny yākuny Makaniny. ṅayiny gan ṅunhi ṅorranan warraw'ṅurnha, gārrin ṅayi barrariṅu.

Manymak, bala ṅayi ṅārriny marrtjin waṅṅinan, bala ṅayi nhāṅalṅha ṅanya. Ga ṅunhi ṅanya ṅayi nhāṅalnydja, bala ṅayi nhanṅu waṅanan bitjarrnha, “Dhuwana nhe!”

Bala ṅanya ṅay wutthurrnha.

p.11 Ga ṅayiny yatjurr bitjarr, “Wa---y, waku, yaka ṅarrany wutthurr!” Ga bulu ṅanya ṅayi wutthurr. ṅayiny rur'yurr, bala gan waṅṅina---n djuṅup ṅarrtha'lilṅha. Yān bili---i, gapulilṅha ṅayi ṅupthurr bala marrtjin waythurrnha. Bala ṅayiny ṅārriny roṅiyinan.

p.12 Waṅṅin ṅayi marrtji---n, dhiyal, bala ṅayiny bāpany Mr Webb-tja waṅan bitjarrnha, “Wanhan mala?”

Ga ṅayiny bitjarr ṅārriny, “ṅunha barrkun mala. Ga wiripuny mala ṅarra marrtjin bumarnha. Ga waṅganyṅhany ṅarra, ga gapulilṅha ṅurrkaṅal. ṅunhadhin waythuna marrtji.” Ga bitjarr ṅayi ṅakaraṅal ṅarrakal bāpa'mirriṅuy ṅārriy.

Ga ṅayiny bitjarr bāpany, “Yaw!” Ga bulu nhanṅu ṅayi waṅan bitjarr, “Go, ṅamakuli'ṅu maṅṅa dhu dhuwal boṅṅuṅ buni, dhuwalaṅuwuy maripuy. Maṅṅa dhu nhakun ṅuwatthurr ṅunhi ṅamakuli'ṅu maṅṅa, ga ṅarra djāl, nhe ṅārriy, Yilkari, ga ṅorṅ ga Ginygaṅam, nhuma dhu malthurrnydja maṅṅaṅ, ga Birrinydjawuy.”

p.13 Manymak, nhinan walal galkurr ñamakuli'ñuw maṇḍaṇ, ga bunan maṇḍa, bala walalaṇ walal larruṇalṇha. Ṇayi Wandhawarriy walalany gāṇalnydja. Wāṇgaṇal walal marrtji---n, bur walal bunan wāṇiya yākuṇur Wolṇir; walalanydja gan ṇunhilin nhinan ṇunhi moṇu'muṇuṇuny mala. Bunanany walal ṇunhi, bala walalaṇ walal waṇanan bitjarrṇha, “Limurrṇha go! Dhuwalawurr bili nhuma. Limurr dhu marrtjin balan, bili dhuwana ñamakuli'ṇuny maṇḍa bili bunanan. Ga nhumany dhu marrtjin. Dhikan McBride-tja marrtjin ga, galki dhu bunan.” (McBride-tja dhuwal, ga marthaṇay.)

p. 14 Bala walal lāw'yurrṇha marrtjin ṇunhi yolṇu'yulṇuny mala. Warrpam' dhika lāw'yurr, ga Rirrṇanydjun (1) wiripuny. Dhuwandja Biranbirrililiw bāpa'mirriṇu yāku. Ṇayiny ṇunhi dharpuṇal ṇunhi ṇāpakinhany. Ga bitjarr walal waṇan, “Yuw! Marrtjin napurr dhu warrpam'ṇha!”

Bala walalany marrtjin ṇunhi ñamakuli'ṇuny dja mata'matamarāṇalṇha, bala walal marrtjinan. Waṇḍin walal marrtji---n, ga Dhābila, ṇayiny gan ṇunhili dhārran mārrma' ṇaku maṇḍany.

p. 15 Manymak, ṇal'ṇalyurr walal bala walal marrtjin gurrmarnha rālin. Ga dhiyal walal bunan, yurr dhawaṭṭhurrnydja walal dhiyal galki do'ṇur; bala walal wapwapthurrṇha. Napurrnydja walalany marrtjin nhāṇalṇha, ga bitjarr napurr, “Way! Bili walalany wala mata'maraṇal.”

Warr wa---rr, ga galkar walalany bay'. Ṇunhilin walal gan ṇorra---n, djaḍaw'. Bitjarrnydja, McBride-tja dhuwana gārri marrtji Ṇamuyaṇikurr.

Dhawaṭṭhurrṇha marrtjin, yurr milmitjpan ṇunhi. Djalkthurr ṇayi gan ṇatha mala napurrṇu, ga bāy walal dhawar'yurr djalkthunaṇur, bala walal moṇu'muṇuṇunhan wapwapmaraṇal ga ṇunhi ṇāpakiny, bala walal marrtjin Darwinlilṇha.

If you are interested in further information about the historical events from this story, follow the links below:

- In the section titled Milingimbi Mission

<https://www.pastmasters.org.au/milingimbi.html>

- A newspaper account from the time

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/48024319>

A note about the pronunciation of Yolŋu sounds:

(from Djambarrpuyŋu language learning course, Shepherdson College, 1986 - unpublished)

ä – this is a long vowel, like the 'a' in bath (p.3), 'a' is a short sound like the 'u' in but

o – this is a long vowel in contrast to the short 'u' in put, 'o' is considered two beats longer than that sound, similar to 'aw' in law. I and e are the same, i short like 'pit', 'e' two beats in length, like 'ee' in bleed (p.3)

ŋ, ɟ ʈ r ɭ – to produce these sounds the tongue is curled back so that the tip of the tongue touches the roof of the mouth (p.6)

ny, dj tj – these are digraphs, two letters but a single sound. The blade of the tongue is pushed towards the upper gum ridge and the tip of the tongue is behind the bottom teeth, 'ny' is like the 'ni' in union (p.5)

nh, dh, th – these are also digraphs. The sound is produced by holding the tip of the tongue between the teeth, the 'th' sound is held longer than the 'nh' and 'dh' sounds (p.5)

ŋ – this sound is produced with the tip of the tongue lying at the bottom of the mouth while the back of the tongue is touching the soft palate, 'ŋ' is like the 'ng' in sing (p.7)

rr – this is a 'rolled r', the tongue is 'flapped' by the flow of air going past it, not the muscles of the tongue

' – this is a glottal stop, the vocal cords are closed, like the English 'uh -oh' between the two words the breath is cut off (p.7)

