

## Time of change in the far north Kimberley Mungalalu-Truscott 13<sup>th</sup> November 2003

The Wunambal Gaambera Aboriginal Corporation (WGAC) representing traditional land owners of the northern Kimberley have taken control of a reserve lease encompassing Mitchell Plateau in the west to Anjo Peninsula in the East.



Truscott Airfield a former World War II airbase at Mungalalu on the Anjo Peninsula hosted the handover ceremony of the Gaambera Aboriginal Reserve and the signing of a lease between WGAC and Triple A Air Services the operator of Mungalalu-Truscott which is now used as a logistics base supporting Coogee Resources offshore exploration and production activities, Papaley Pearl farms and surveillance activity operated by Surveillance Australia on behalf of Customs Coastwatch.

The heritage listed Mungalalu-Truscott Airfield was abandoned shortly after the war, the surrounding bush bears testimony to this recent history with a litter of artefacts from that time, in addition rock art of the Gwion (Bradshaw) style on many rock outcrops in the vicinity bear testimony to events from a more remote past



Santos through a lease with Kalumburu Aboriginal Corporation (KAC) reopened the airfield in 1989 to support offshore oil and gas exploration activity later relinquishing the lease to Triple A Air Services in 1999 on completion of exploration. Since that time Triple A have refurbished and replaced buildings and equipment installed by Santos and successfully marketed the base to the clients referred to above.



For 15 years the airfield has provided an income for the Kalumburu aboriginal community.

As preparations for the ceremony were finalised a group of the principal guests and senior elders were taken on an orientation flight in the resident Super Puma helicopter, this courtesy of CHC Australia and Triple A.



The route took the party over Van Sittart Bay to a scenic and culturally important area at King Anna, from there to a pearl farm in Freshwater Bay, returning over the Eclipse Group of islands then tracking south back down the Anjo Peninsula to Mungalalu-Truscott.

The airfield was busy all day as guests flew in including Bishop Christopher Saunders of Broome, CEO Wayne Bergman of Kimberley Land Council council officials, representatives of Wyndham and Derby Shire Councils, W.A, Police - Wyndham Station, James Paspaley and Richard McLean representing Paspaley Pearls, Arthur Hamilton and Alex Wood of Triple A from Darwin and Adelaide respectively. Several Wunambal elders flew in from Derby for the occasion.

On Thursday the 99 year lease of Gaambera Aboriginal Reserve was transferred from the Kalumburu Aboriginal Corporation to the Wunambal Gaambera Aboriginal Corporation. The formal ceremony was opened by Senior Elders Benedict Chainmora assisted by Louis Karadada.

Bishop Saunders gave a blessing on the proceedings followed by the opening address. The Chairman of KAC & Chairperson of WGAC exchanged copies of the Gaambera Reserve Lease, this was followed by an exchange of signed copies of the Mungalalu-Truscott Sub Lease between WGAC Chairperson and Arthur Hamilton M.D. of Triple A Air Services.

Alex Wood, Director of Triple A gave a short address covering a condensed history of the airfield since it was reopened in 1989 and the future potential as the "Kimberley Hub"

The Official Address was given by Mr Wayne Bergman CEO of the Kimberley Land Council who remarked that the achievements of KAC, WGAC and Triple A on the Gaambera Reserve and Mungalalu - Truscott agreement was a model which Commonwealth and State governments should encourage.

The transfer celebrated with a traditional feast of turtle and dugong followed by a corroboree telling the story of a great storm which drove whales onto the beach in Napier-Broome Bay.



WGAC chairperson Dianna Williams said the airfield provided an economic base for the community and the potential to develop tourism based on their culture, nearby Gwion rock art, wartime history, the pristine waters, the scenic beauty of the regions coastal country and unsurpassed fishing.

Triple A director Alex Wood said since 1999 use of the airfield had mainly been by Coastwatch and Paspaley Pearls with ad hoc oilfield work, but it was picking up due to a recent agreement with Coogee Resources for the continuous support of offshore oil production facilities at Jabiru and Challis oil fields.

Mr Wood said with increasing activity in the oil fields and on the aquaculture scene and with tourism virtually untapped, his vision of

Mungalalu-Truscott becoming the Regional Hub for the North Kimberley was close to fruition.

Wunambal elder Louis Karadada said it was a proud day because they had sorted out among themselves that the land properly belonged to the Wunambal Gaambera people.

Mr Karadada remembered burning the bush to make an airstrip during the war and working with up to 2000 army and air force personnel stationed at Truscott.

“White man came on a plane from Darwin, stayed for while and went back again,” Mr Karadada said.

“Everybody from and Balangarra came He said they were for Japanese work at the base drums and general given a khaki uniform wage. brother Jack are who worked at war and know the wrecks.

“Twelve young people here but they have bombs, they couldn’t tree and bombs went said.



Wunambal Gaambera to work at Truscott.” sent out bush looking infiltrators or put to digging bores, rolling labouring. They were and rations but no Mr Karadara and some of the few left Truscott during the stories behind the

tried to take off from too much go high, they hit the off,” Mr Karadada

The remains of the Liberator aircraft were left where it crashed as was another plane that crashed in West Bay, its tail still visible at low tide.



Liberator bomber - one of the types operated from Truscott

As the turtles were roasted by Joseph Karadada using buried hot rocks, Basil Djanghara a past master of the dance directed the corroboree, shouting encouragement and instructions in a mix of English and the local Kwini language.



The story of the whales is depicted in dance and totems carried by dancers



Later Mr Djanghara said "Most of our stories about sea, that's our life, turtles, dugongs, fish, stingray, everything"

At 71 Mr Djanghara is the eldest of the Wunambal people, still healthy he reflected that he would soon need to pass on the stories to the younger people.