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released soldiers for front line work.

Among the women were skilled laundresses, housemaids, waitresses, bakers, cooks and hospital orderlies (W.C. Duffy "Army Gave Our Aborigines a New Deal" in Melbourne Herald n.d. [incomplete reference]).

In a situation of utter boredom, with few amenities, no female company, and not even a war to fight, some white soldiers acknowledged the beneficial influence of aboriginal friendship on their morale (Lockwood 1973:182).

The bombing of Quail Island

Quail Island is perhaps one of the best known places associated with the claim area: it has won this notoriety through its use by the R.A.A.F. as a bombing range and the opposition to that practice by the local Aborigines. Although we have already documented for the past many instances of disruption of traditional Aboriginal lifestyle and their dislocation from traditional lands, the Quail Island situation provides a contemporary example of this process.

Quail Island is widely acknowledged among Larrakia and Wagaidj Aborigines as a very important place. It was formerly a site at which ceremonies took place and remains a site of special significance on one of the most important dreaming tracks associated with the claim. It is also an important breeding place for turtles which local Aborigines would have liked to continue hunting.

As mentioned elsewhere (chapter five) the island has been in a bombing area since 1942 although the area was only gazetted in 1957. The R.A.A.F. discouraged people going into the area, control of Aborigines being taken on by the Welfare Branch:

... so far as the natives of Delissaville Settlement are concerned we will continue the present arrangement which provides for the complete prohibition of movement in the area of natives from Delissaville and, as far as we can police the surrounding areas, we will see that natives who may camp at other points in the area (Two-Feller Creek and the mouth of the Finnis River) do not visit the area (H.C. Giese, Director of Welfare, to Group Captain D.R. Chapman, Officer in Command, R.A.A.F.,

Darwin, letter dated 15 February 1961).

One consideration in leaving the Quail Island area in the hands of the R.A.A.F. was concern that the responsibility for this place made dangerous by unexploded bombs would shift from the R.A.A.F. to the Northern Territory Administration:

I think it is most unlikely that R.A.A.F. would ever consider vacating the area as a bombing range; and I would certainly not press for that, since even if it were released, I doubt very much that the area could ever be made safe, and it would only mean that the responsibility for preventing accidents arising out of the movement of people in the area would be moved from the R.A.A.F. to ourselves (J.C. Archer, the Administrator, to the Director of Welfare, memo dated 10 February 1961).

In 1965 Philip Roberts, an Aborigine from Roper River spoke in support of the local Aborigines' claim that Quail Island was an important place which should not be bombed.

Bill Day, who has worked for many years on behalf of Iarrakia people to get land at Kalalak, joined the Aboriginal protesters in 1972 and has continued to draw attention to the issue in

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Mr. Walter Fejo, a N.A.C.C. representative for Darwin, complained of bombing Quail Island. Around the same time [1974] the people of Delissaville signed a petition asking that the bombing be stopped. In 1973 four Aborigines all of whom are associated with the claim, camped on Quail Island during a bombing exercise in protest over the bombing (Adelaide Advertiser, 13 November 1973). Although Aborigines of the claim area are concerned and have been complaining about the use of the island by the R.A.A.F. for over twenty years, bombs were dropped in the area as recently as December 1979. Perhaps the bombs will stop one day because of the proximity of the bombing range to the Town of Darwin (the present boundary is less than ten miles from Quail Island): this seems more likely than the wishes of the Aborigines being respected.