

## Tiwi Peoples Stories (Civilians) from WWII



Figure 1. Statue of Matthias Ulungura.

The statue of Matthias Ulungura (1921-1980) stands in front of the radio shack from which Father McGrath sent the first warning to Darwin of an air raid attack. Matthias received a small sum of money at a much later, in 1964 —£65 and 15 shillings— for his assistance to the military during the war. However, recognition for capturing the first Japanese prisoner on Australian soil, Pilot Hajime Toyoshima (1920-1944) came much later in the 1990s culminating in this memorial unveiled in 2016. The statue was unveiled at Wurrumiyanga on Bathurst Island.

## In His Own Words

As told by **Matthias Ulungura** (1921-1980)

19<sup>th</sup> February 1942 - We all been camp along a Melville Island side and gone that morning everyone. We stop along Crewrue that place we stop now. I caught him at might be tea time. Alright I see that Jap and I been sitting down my camp now. I facing Darwin and I see white face and black dress. I see him through the bushes and I go first. I told the other men to run away and then I sneak up quick and wait behind a tree. He walked close past me. I walked after him and grab his wrist near gun. He get proper big fright. I take revolver from his right side near his knee. Then I walk backwards pointing gun I say 'stick 'em up right up, two hands no more no more holding hands on head'. I point revolver more close. Then I call Barnet, Paddy the Liar and Three Fellow and told them to take clothes off pilot but to leave underpants on him and singlet. Boots I make him take off alright. He point to sore foot. I took from him a camera map and blue cloth. He signed to burn map and blue cloth. I think might be he does not want anyone to see it. I put it on log he kept looking at it. So I put it up a tree I made him sit down in camp. I made a big fire. He said "Merica" and shook his head and held up his hand. Might be, I think, he does not like America. Alright we start sleep, me one side, Jap the other. He woke up middle night. He point me to lie down and go to sleep. I keep out from fire, stay out cold place, might be I think if I go to sleep, he run away. I think too he got properly ugly face. I cannot understand him what he say. Morning time I give him boots. I told other men. We start to take him to the mission. I make him walk behind Three Feller and young Tiger with stick. Big Barney walk behind him with big stick. I walk side with revolver and knife. I took bullets out and make Jap show me how to work gun. Then I fire gun near his feet he jump. We cross creek, we all drink, Jap he drink too. We walk and come out end of Melville Island - at Paru opposite Bathurst Island Mission. We see big American plane broken on aerodrome. Jap he try to get away.

He draw star on ground. He made sign that he did not want to go across the water. Three Feller mind him I go down along beach. I sing out four times 'Canoe'. Nobody answer me. I shoot one bullet in salt water. Everyone know now. Paul Kerinaua he bring that Canoe alright, canoe middle water, I go back I told him 'We go'. He did not move.

I point gun, he come now. I go behind alright. We put him in canoe. Paul paddled held gun. I saw Australian Sergeant ran to a tree and make ready 303 rifle. I sing out to Frank "You tell Sarge no more come out yet". We get longa shore.

He (Sarge) said to Jap "put up your hands". Jap no see Sarge. He no understand what he say. Now Jap turn. 'Hey' Sergeant say, 'put up your hands'. Jap look frighten, he salute, bend low four times. Sarge he know me from helping put mines in aerodrome. 'Oh', he says 'You Matthias'. He give me rifle, I give revolver. I watch Jap, Sarge fire revolver near Jap. We come to RAAF place. Might be five or six Australians there. Wireless him there. Jap put inside on chair. He get tucker, big mob number one. Soldiers talk about Zero plane. I put camera, map cloth on table and then go sit outside. I could not understand, I thought they would shoot him for Jap humbugging Darwin and mission. Father McGrath rides up on horse. He say in my language "Yirringkirtyirti" (?). That it "He got properly ugly face". I have good laugh.



Figure 2. Tiwi Heroes: Exhibition and WWII Encounters Darwin

Battle flag of Petty Officer Hajime Toyoshima who was the Japanese pilot captured by Matthias Ulungura on the 19th February 19. His A6M Zero was the first of that type to be recovered relatively intact on allied territory when he crash landed on Melville Island, Toyoshima was the first Japanese prisoner of war to be captured in Australia.



Figure 3. Tiwi Man Matthias Ulungura 1942

National Archives of Australia: [Northern Territory] Administrator, Northern Territory [II] - Central Registry; CA1070, Correspondence files, annual single number series, 1961-1966; 1965/2637, *Aborigines employed by the RAN during 1939/1945 war*.

Ulungura, M. (n.d.). *In his own words*. Wurrumiyanga - Bathurst Island Museum

Figure 1. Christophersen, D. (2021) *Statue of Matthias Ulungura (1921-1980)*. [Image].

Figure 2. Library & Archives NT. (2022). *Opening of the Tiwi Heroes Exhibition*. [Image].

Figure 3. Matthias Ulungura, 1942, NTAS, Brother Pye, NTRS 1812, Item 40.



Welfare Branch

Mr. Matthias Ulungura,  
C/o Bathurst Island Mission  
Via Darwin, N.T.

Dear Matthias,

1. I am pleased to be able to advise you that the Royal Australian Air Force have agreed that you should have been rewarded for the help you gave the Air Force during the war. For this help it has been decided that you should receive a gift of £65 & 15 shillings and I enclosed a cheque for this amount with this letter.

2. You will be interested to know that one of the men who helped us most in telling the R.A.A.F. what you did was Flying Officer S. H. Moore. He told us that you were with him on Bathurst and Melville Islands during all of 1942 when the bombing of Darwin was heaviest.

3. I congratulate you on what you did, and feel sure that you have deserved this late recognition of your assistance.

Yours sincerely,

(H. C. GIESE  
Director of Welfare 31/8/1964