Yugambeh Nation

Name: _____

Date: _____

AGES 14 AND UP · TRUTH-TELLING

The Mary River, 1860

Content note. This sheet describes a massacre. The events happened in Butchulla Country (Maryborough), not Yugambeh Country.

Today, we pause to remember another painful chapter written onto this Country. In early February 1860, in what is now Maryborough in the Wide Bay region, violence once again fell upon our Old People within the Butchulla Nation. Under the command of Native Police officer Lieutenant John O'Connell Bligh, troopers rode into an Aboriginal camp near a township store, a place where families had gathered, as they had for generations along the Mary River.

What followed was not policing. It was a massacre.

Witnesses described troopers charging the camp and chasing Aboriginal men, women, and children through the streets of the young settlement and down toward the riverbanks. Shots rang out in town and along the water. Some people were hit where they ran; others were driven into the Mary River and fired upon there.

Colonial accounts — fragmentary and often reluctant — recorded individual tragedies. An Aboriginal man referred to in the record as "Darkey" was reportedly shot in the street and later burned. Another, known as "Young Snatchem," was said to have been shot in the back by Bligh while in the river. The full number of lives taken was never formally counted, a silence that reflects how little value colonial systems placed on Aboriginal lives.

Even at the time, not everyone accepted this violence quietly. A letter published in the Moreton Bay Courier condemned the incident as a "butchering," alleging that the troopers, possibly intoxicated, behaved like "bloodthirsty brutes." Such rare contemporary criticism reminds us that the brutality was visible even to those within the settler society itself.

In the work of truth-telling and Nation Building, remembering matters:

- Truth as foundation: We cannot build an honest future while these histories remain half-spoken or softened. Frontier violence must be named plainly.
- Survival as resistance: Despite shootings, poisonings, displacement, and policies aimed at erasure, our kinship systems, languages, and cultural responsibilities endure.
- Sovereignty of story: When we tell these histories ourselves, our ancestors are no longer statistics or colonial footnotes — they are custodians whose Law and belonging were never surrendered.

As we reflect on those attacked along the Mary River in February 1860, we honour them through continuation: caring for Country, teaching language, strengthening family, and insisting on truth.

The frontier brought terrible loss — but it did not bring erasure.

We are still here. Our connection to this Country remains.

Always was. Always will be.

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THE MARY RIVER, 1860

Questions

Questions

1. Where and when did these events happen, and in whose Country?

2. Who commanded the troopers?

3. Why was the full number of lives taken never formally counted, according to the Reading?

4. What did a letter in the Moreton Bay Courier say about the attack? Why does the Reading call this criticism “rare”?

5. List the three reasons the Reading gives for why remembering matters.

6. How does the Reading say the Nation honours those who were attacked?

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