



AIATSIS
Australian Institute of Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander Studies

Finding aid

BARKER_J21

**Sound recordings collected by
Jimmie Barker, 1971**

Prepared January, 2021 by BS
Last updated 1 March 2024

ACCESS

Availability of copies

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Restrictions on listening

This collection is open for listening.

Restrictions on use

Conditions of use relating to copying, quotation and publication are currently under review and will be updated on this page soon.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

Date: 1971

Extent: 1 audio tape reel (46 min.) : analogue, mono ; 3 in. + field tape report sheets

Production history

These recordings were collected in July 1971 by Jimmie Barker. They feature Mr Barker discussing his life story, as well as information on Muruwari language and cultural heritage.

The recording project was initiated by Janet Mathews, who obtained funding from the AIAS to provide recording equipment and consumables.

RELATED MATERIAL

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Transcripts of these field tapes are held in the AIATSIS Library, see PMS 205 and MS 89. For a complete listing of related material held by AIATSIS, consult our [online catalogue](#), Mura®. To conduct a search of available audio finding aids, please [click here](#).

ARCHIVIST'S NOTE

This finding aid was compiled from information provided by Jimmie Barker, Roy Barker, Janet Mathews and audition sheets prepared by AIATSIS staff. Timing points may be slightly out, depending on the technologies and procedures in place at the time the recordings were auditioned.

ITEM LIST

Archive number	Field recording number	Description
010292	Field tape "WEAPONS"	Jimmie Barker discusses a set of weapons he has made for Janet Mathews.

ITEM DESCRIPTIONS

010292/FT “WEAPONS” Side 1 and 2

Performer/speaker(s):	Jimmie Barker
Personal subject(s):	Janet Mathews, Albert Kelly
Subject keywords:	Plants – Trees, Economic sectors - Trades - Woodworking and joinery, Weapons - Spears – Throwing, Weapons - Clubs and fighting sticks, Weapons - Clubs and fighting sticks – Fighting, Weapons - Clubs and fighting sticks – Making, Weapons - Shields, Religions - Christianity - Missions, Law enforcement – Prisons, Health - Treatments - Traditional - Clever People, Magic and sorcery, Technology - Stone - Axes / hatchets, Weapons - Boomerangs - Throwing, Weapons – Spearthrowers, Religion – Totemism, Hunting - Birds - Emus, Hunting - Kangaroo / Wallaby,
Language/people:	D32: MURUWARI, D22: NGIYAMPAA / NGEMPA
Places:	Brewarrina (N NSW SH55-06),
Recording quality:	Fair

Archive item number	Timing point	Description	Date	Place
BARKER_J21-010292	00:01:11	Jimmie Barker gives the context for the following discussion – a set of weapons he has made for Janet Mathews’ children.	1971	Lightning Ridge, NSW
	00:04:55	Jimmie Barker speaks about the timber used in making traditional Muruwari weapons and firesticks.		
	00:09:54	Jimmie Barker speaks about weapons – the methods of creating them, their specific uses.		
	00:23:35	Jimmie Barker speaks about Albert Kelly and his assault of the Brewarrina Mission Overseer with a <i>Gudjeru</i> in 1913.		
	00:27:14	Jimmie Barker speaks about weapons in relation to sorcery and the use of “green stones” for sharpening.		
	00:31:32	Jimmie Barker speaks about the application of weapons in fighting and hunting.		
	00:46:14	End of field tape “WEAPONS” and end of BARKER_J21-010292.		

Timing point	Description
	<u>Jimmi Barker discusses a set of weapons made for Janet Mathews' children. Jimmie provides description, method of creation and the traditional uses associated with these weapons.</u>
00:00:01	14 seconds of tone.
00:01:02	Archive announcement – Archive tape 010292, unnumbered 3 inch reel.
00:01:11	Jimmi Barker begins by stating the approximate time (Sunday night) and the date (July 25 th , 1971).
00:01:17	Jimmi Barker addresses Janet Mathews directly in the form of first person correspondence. Jimmie explains how hard he has been working to make weapons for her.
00:01:39	Jimmi Barker explains to Janet Mathews the difficulty involved in making these weapons, the tools used (a rough file, a pocket knife and steel wool) and the time taken (14 nights).
00:02:49	Jimmi Barker speaks about selecting the Coolabah roots from which the weapons were made.
00:03:53	Jimmi Barker explains that each weapon took approximately 4 hours to make.
00:04:16	Jimmi Barker speaks about getting “an itchy head” whenever he is frustrated by a task.
00:04:55	Jimmi Barker speaks about the colour of the Coolabah roots and finishing them with olive oil.
00:05:34	Jimmi Barker explains that the Coolabah root timber when exposed to sunlight has a tendency to turn white.
00:06:15	Jimmi Barker speaks about the variation in colour of the Coolabah root timber, explaining that it varies from tree to tree according to factors such as the age of the tree and the length (depth) of the roots.
00:06:59	Jimmi Barker explains how the Coolabah, Blackbox and all gum trees are part of the plant genus known as Eucalypt.
00:07:31	Jimmi Barker speaks about the traditional practice of making fire sticks out of eucalypt tree roots. Jimmie describes in detail how well adapted these roots are for this use.
00:08:54	Jimmi Barker explains how he acquired a scar on his chest from a fire stick when as a boy he tried to light a clay pipe and was caught in the act by his mother.
00:09:54	Jimmi Barker by way of recap explains again to Janet the large amount of work involved in making this set of weapons. Jimmie speaks about making a frame for the weapons and regrets only having plywood to work with.
00:10:26	Jimmi Barker speaks about using pins for this frame where he would have preferred to use upholstery tacks. Jimmie suggests to Janet Mathews that if she can access these tacks she might use them on the corners of the frame.
00:11:14	Jimmi Barker speaks about using Dulux paint on the frame (he mentions the price - two dollars a pint) where he would have preferred to use wood stain.
00:11:44	Jimmi Barker draws Janet Mathews' attention to three holes across the top of the frame and suggests to Janet that she might insert eyelets into these holes to be able to hang the frame with wire.
00:12:23	Jimmi Barker speaks about some of the methods and conventions used for hanging pictures.
00:13:05	Jimmi Barker speaks to Janet Mathews about a wooden “prop” and a piece of plastic that he has added to the frame to aid Janet in mounting the frame.

00:15:21	Jimmie Barker turns his attention to the weapons naming them in sequence: 1. Wogenurra
00:16:47	2. Bundera Gulea – long spear Jimmie Barker explains to Janet Mathews that he made a version of this <i>Gulea</i> with two barbs on one side. Jimmie recalls that the Ngemba favoured this version of the <i>Gulea</i> as it provided “better balance” when thrown with the barbs pointing down to the ground. Jimmie describes the <i>Bundera Gulea</i> as a “fighting spear.”
00:18:26	3. Wagwinara - club Jimmie Barker distinguishes the pronunciation of the name of this weapon from the first weapon discussed - the <i>Wogenurra</i> . Jimmie describes the <i>Wagwinara</i> as “a pretty nasty club,” and points out some little “tomahawk shaped” protrusions on the head of the club designed to lacerate the flesh during combat.
00:19:13	4. Bundi - club Jimmie Barker explains that this <i>Bundi</i> (or club) was used for human combat and also for hunting. Jimmie states that this type of <i>Bundi</i> “was made and kept” as opposed to the disposable kind that was made for “quick and lively jobs,” – see discussion of this type of <i>Bundi</i> in audition sheet 002164A between the timing points 00:17:55 and 00:21:09.
00:19:44	5. Bulbu – shield Jimmie Barker speaks about the <i>Bulbu</i> (shield) and how he made two <i>bundis</i> to sit either side of it.
00:20:05	6. Mainmuru – large club Jimmie Barker provides a translation of <i>Mainmuru</i> as “man killer.” In another recording (002164A timing point 00:12:46) Jimmie provides an alternate translation “man club.” Jimmie speaks about how the <i>Mainmuru</i> and the <i>Wagwinara</i> were used after the other lighter, projected weapons had been used. Jimmie explains the <i>Mainmuru</i> was known by many as the “rib softener.” Jimmie himself refers to it as the “rib buster.” It was used to deliver the fatal blow or to quote Jimmie the “Coup de grace.”
00:21:15	Jimmie Barker speaks about how the <i>Mainmuru</i> was also used for mercy killing in instances where someone was “wounded beyond recovery.” Jimmie explains that in these instances death would be administered by a blow to the back of the head.
00:21:41	Jimmie Barker speaks about some hypothetical combat situations in which the <i>Mainmuru</i> , <i>Wagwinara</i> and <i>Bundera Gulea</i> might be used.
00:22:16	Jimmie Barker speaks about the Boomerang and explains that whilst this term is widely used, particularly by non – Aboriginal people, Widjenara is the correct traditional name. Jimmie describes this weapon as principally a fighting tool but one used for hunting.
00:22:53	Gudjeru. Jimmie Barker describes the <i>Gudjeru</i> as “one of the deadliest of all the weapons.”
00:23:26	Archive end announcement.
00:23:35	Jimmie Barker continues to discuss the <i>Gudjeru</i> and tells an anecdote from Brewarrina mission in 1913. Jimmie speaks about an incident involving Albert Kelly and the overseer of Brewarrina mission. Accusations of dog poisoning escalated such that Albert threw a <i>Gudjeru</i> at the Overseer striking him on the back of the head. Jimmie explains that had the blow struck an inch lower the Overseer would have been killed stone dead.
00:25:06	Jimmie Barker by way of illustrating its destructive power recalls that the <i>Gudjeru</i> continued beyond the target and split an 8 by 2 inch hardwood slab in the fireplace.

00:26:00	Jimmie Barker explains that following this incident Albert Kelly was arrested and served six months in prison. The Brewarrina mission manager confiscated Albert Kelly's collection of weapons from his wife.
00:26:24	Jimmie Barker speaks about Albert Kelly's collection of weapons and his weapons making.
00:26:39	Jimmie Barker speaks about Albert Kelly's heritage and character.
00:26:49	Momentary break in recording.
00:26:52	Jimmie explains the break in recording, stating that someone pulled up with a radio blaring.
00:27:14	Dojuin – stone tomahawk Jimmie Barker describes this weapon as a stone tomahawk and explains that it is also referred to as a <i>Wogenurra</i> as both weapons share a similar blade. Jimmie explains that for a witch doctor this weapon is known as a <i>Wilada</i> (???)
00:28:00	Jimmie Barker speaks about the Cleverman's <i>Dojuin/Wilada</i> (???) as a kind of elevated <i>Wogenurra</i> . Jimmie speaks about the <i>Wilada</i> (???) used by a Cleverman Jimmy Kerrigan who was well known to Jimmie.
00:28:27	Jimmie Barker speaks about how Clevermen would chant when using their <i>wiladas</i> so that the "tomahawk would do the work."
00:29:07	Jimmie Barker speaks about the stone blade of the <i>Dojuin</i> . Jimmie explains that he used an original blade (found about 40 years prior to the time of recording). Jimmie speaks about the providence of this blade explaining that it was made for a tomahawk, probably made for a young boy.
00:29:53	Jimmie Barker confesses to not knowing the method that would have been used to grind this stone down. Jimmie speaks about using a carborundum stone to modify the blade to fit his own <i>Dojuin</i> design.
00:30:35	Jimmie Barker speaks about how tomahawks, knives and spearheads were sharpened by groups of men so that the heavy burden of labour could be shared.
00:31:10	Jimmie Barker speaks about the "green stones" used for sharpening and wonders where they came from. Jimmie himself doesn't remember ever seeing this stone naturally occurring in the area and suspects that it may have been introduced through bartering or exchange.
00:31:32	Jimmie Barker speculates that the tomahawk may be hundreds of years old. Jimmie suggests it's "a real baby tomahawk ... that may have belonged to a little boy once."
00:31:55	Womera – spear Jimmie speaks about how the word <i>Womera</i> is inauthentic – the correct term is <i>Wamera</i> . Jimmie explains that the weapon consists of two components, the <i>Wama</i> (throwing stick or lever) and the <i>Gulea</i> (spear).
00:33:10	Jimmie Barker draws attention to the notch in the <i>Wama</i> designed to house the end of the <i>Gulea</i> . Jimmie describes the throwing technique used for combat and fishing.
00:33:58	Jimmie Barker speaks about the barb on the <i>Gulea</i> adapted specifically for fishing.
00:35:20	Jimmie Barker speaks about the <i>Murali</i> (the comeback boomerang). Jimmie speaks about throwing the boomerang and reports that when thrown in to the wind it "comes back."
00:36:52	Jimmie Barker speaks about two barbless spears and explains that it was against Aboriginal lore to use barbed spears when hunting kangaroos and emus in deference to the totemic relationship between these animals and local groups.
00:39:50	Jimmie Barker speaks about the <i>Muru</i> – a hunting club. Jimmie explains that this weapon was used for hunting kangaroos, emus and other animals.
00:41:15	Jimmie Barker speaks about weapons used for fighting, explaining that the best were kept for tribal warfare.

00:42:40	Jimmie Barker instructs Janet Mathews on how to sequentially remove the weapons from the frame or what we might infer is a type of case. Jimmie's instructions are extensive as removing the weapons would seem to be in no way straightforward.
00:44:17	Jimmie Barker lists the weapons he didn't make – the short spear (<i>Gulea</i>), the <i>Gadibudel</i> and the <i>Gurura</i> .
00:44:45	Jimmie Barker signs off in a 1st person address to Janet Mathews expressing again how hard he worked to make these weapons. Jimmie expresses his hope that they are appropriate for the "kiddies." This gives an indication of the background as to why and for whom Janet Mathews commissioned these weapons from Jimmie Barker.
00:45:57	Archive end announcement.
00:46:14	End of 010292

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