

### ***A Tragic Droving Job (By S.G.R.)***

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This is an authentic record of an extra ordinary series of tragic happenings, that dogged a droving job in this State. Of those men interested in the transaction six died, one was very badly burned, and one injured

The happenings were all at separate intervals, and each victim was well known to the majority of our pastoralists in the middle north and north west. A lease of their lives could have been taken and they were typical of the virile, men who handle our stock across the lonely tracks in the back country None of them were old men. the eldest being in their middle forties

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Their names were:— Charles James, Arthur Nicol, Watty Pearce, Ted Scott; Neil McColl, H.Lacy, L Kung and Jack Shepherd. It is the custom for pastoralists in the north annually to sell drafts of surplus stock, either for delivery on the station or to be overlanded to the southern markets. In February of 1928 Major McAdam, a partner in Wallal Downs Pastoral Company, north of Port Hedland, instructed his agents, Dalgety and Co. Ltd. to arrange with a competent drover to lift 5,000 sheep on June 1 and deliver them to Meekatharra.

In February Arthur Nicol of Dalgety and Co. opened negotiations with Charles James, who was then staying at "Mon Repos" Cottesloe. A droving contract was made, and James arranged to start his plant for Wallal about the middle of April. During March, however, James sent word, that he had developed a physical complaint, and that he would be unable to carry out the work.

Neil McColl, another very experienced and reliable drover, then undertook the job. He made all arrangements to get his plant together, and was to leave for the north not later than April 20. Early in that month on medical advice, he had to relinquish the task.

Another very experienced stockman Watty Pearce who was then at Yalgoo undertook the work. After laying in a supply of stores, and adding to his equipment, he started his 700 mile walk to Wallal where he was to take delivery of the sheep. He engaged two other experienced stock hands to go with him, Kilmurray and Silvester. They made good progress, and were well on their way, when word came through that Charles James had died on May 5, 1928. Before they had reached Nullagine they received advice that Arthur Nicol, who appeared to be in the pink of health, had expired suddenly, following a heart attack, on May 22, 1928.

### ***Death and a Miraculous Escape.***

Pearce and his team continued on their way, and nothing untoward happened until they arrived at Wallal. Practically without warning Pearce fell ill, and had to be taken to the Port Hedland Hospital, where he died on June 19, 1928. Almost simultaneously, Mr. H. Lacy, the managing partner of Wallal, escaped death by a miracle. The Store on the station caught fire, and was completely demolished. Lacy was very badly burned. An aeroplane was requisitioned, but this broke down, and Lacy, suffering severely, had to be conveyed by car. Owing to tyre trouble, the car was delayed several hours on the road, arriving at the Port Hedland Hospital on the following day, with the patient in a dangerous and exhausted condition. Fortunately a good constitution and careful nursing enabled Lacy to return to the station, after a few weeks rest at Port Hedland.

The sheep had been mustered, and were ready for the road, but the death of Drover Pearce and the accident to Mr. Lacy interfered with their starting down the track. Further complications arose, as Pearce died intestate, and the Curator of Intestate Estates could not provide a drover to carry out the work to the owners' approval. The isolated position of the station delayed negotiations, and finally the police took possession of Pearce's plant and disposed of it on account of the Curator of Intestate Estates.

With these extraordinary happenings and delays, and the lateness of the season, the owners decided to postpone the transportation of their stock until the following year. Those who have knowledge of the movements of stock will appreciate the advisability of this action. The stock route was drying up fast, the sheep had 600 miles to walk, a 12 week journey and water and feed difficulties could be foreseen. Thus ended the first attempt to move this mob of sheep. Two drovers and Arthur Nicol were dead, and Lacy was still confined to hospital.

As the season came round fresh preparations were made to drive the sheep south. In March, 1929, Neil McColl who had apparently recovered from his ailment agreed to carry out the work. He made the necessary preparations and was to start for Wallal about the middle of April. Fate apparently decided that he was not to do this work, as a recurrence of his complaint necessitated his going into hospital in Perth. A new drover, E. J. Scott, was engaged, who at the time was at Mullewa with Wallal 780 miles away. An early start was made as fully six weeks would be employed in walking his plant to the station.

Scott, who was accompanied by his brother-in-law, Paul Devaurno, and others, was reported unwell when he arrived at Mundiwindi. Battling along, Scott and his men arrived at Marble Bar in the third week in May, when Scott was taken seriously ill and died in the Marble Bar hospital on May 24, 1929. More confusion and delay. The Curator of Intestate Estates again came into the picture and the police took control of the plant.

### ***Continued Disaster.***

The personnel of the team was good, but a leading drover had to be employed. Arrangements were made with, the Curator to utilise the horses, mules and plant, to carry out the droving work. As more horses were required for the droving job, Mr. Lacy arranged with one of the men in Scotts team, L. Kung, to break in a few of the station hacks. In carrying out this work, Kung was thrown, and had to be conveyed to Port Hedland hospital. 100 miles distant, where he was treated for a broken collar bone, and detained for further treatment.

We are all more or less superstitious and drovers like others try to sidestep any thing in the way of the supernatural. Two experienced men were offered the task of droving the Wallal stock but politely declined. An old experienced hand, Joe Waldeck, was then in the North and he undertook the task of lifting the sheep. He was well on his journey south when the fifth tragic death occurred. Neil McColl died on July 18, 1929.

As Waldeck's droving plant moved down the stock route with the sheep, one of the team, Jack Shepherd, became ill. He was taken into the Meekatharra hospital where he died on November 1, 1929. Waldeck delivered his mob safely without further mishap, but was naturally pleased to complete this 'hoodoo' job. A work of fiction which compressed so much of tragedy into so small a compass would be derided as outraging the probabilities. .