

## *Atomic Thunder: The Maralinga Story*

by Elizabeth Tynan

xv + 373pp., NewSouth Publishing, Sydney, 2016,  
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Review by Maggie Brady  
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This is a highly readable account of the history and consequences of the British nuclear testing program in Australia – primarily the minor and major trials at Maralinga, South Australia, and the 1985 royal commission investigation and findings. Tynan’s closest competitor, Robert Milliken’s *No Conceivable Injury: The Story of Britain and Australia’s Atomic Cover-up*, was published in 1986 and was thus unable to cover subsequent scandals associated with the tests, the more recent reviews of veterans’ claims and entitlements, the 2003 Maralinga Rehabilitation Technical Advisory Committee (MARTAC) report on the studies of the test site ‘clean-up’, and even the involvement of Wikileaks. Tynan addresses these developments with aplomb, and while her book covers much of the same ground as Milliken, *Atomic Thunder* has immediacy and verve, while successfully weaving in a huge amount of complex material. One chapter out of 12 deals with the impact of the tests on Aboriginal people: the Western Desert groups who moved between Warburton, Ernabella, Cundeelee, Ooldea and Lake Phillipson near Coober Pedy.

My main quibble with this volume is the absence of proper citations: while there are reference lists for each chapter, the reader has no way of confirming or following up on a particular quote. For a story covering so many crucial decisions, dates and events this is hugely problematic and I found it particularly so in the chapter ‘Indigenous people and the bomb tests’, where several small errors creep in relatively unnoticed. For example, Tynan claims (from an unnamed source) that the Minister for Supply ordered Aboriginal people out of Ooldea to make way for the tests at Emu, when in fact the Emu site was not approved until September 1952, months after Ooldea mission closed down due to a split within the United Aborigines Missions (UAM) organisation. The linguistic meaning of the name ‘Ooldea’ is attributed to a lawyer writing in 2006; however, she had in turn cited a secondary

source that had referenced a book written by a UAM missionary. It is surprising that Tynan has not referred to the Final Submissions to the 1985 royal commission made on behalf of all Aboriginal groups and individuals that was compiled by lawyers Geoff Eames and Andrew Collett. Their definitive volume is easily available at the AIATSIS library.

## Reference

Eames, Geoff and Andrew Collett 1985, 'Royal Commission into British Nuclear Tests in Australia: Final submission by counsel on behalf of Aboriginal organisations and individuals', AIAS R85/56, Adelaide.

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