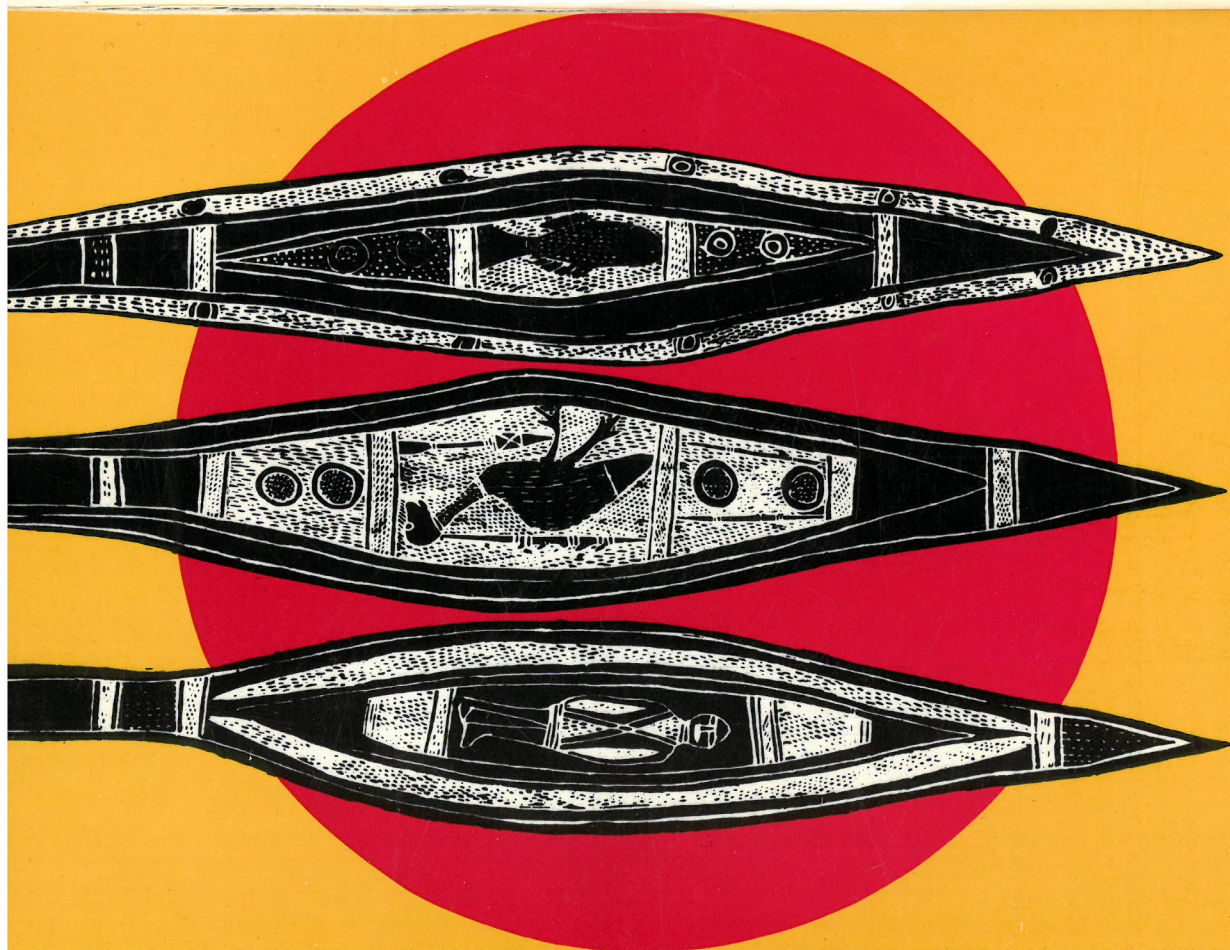


The Black Resistance

Fergus Robinson and Barry York



The Black Resistance

An introduction to the history of
the Aborigines' struggle
against British Colonialism

Fergus Robinson and Barry York

Widescope

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This book is dedicated to those brave men and women
who died defending their country.
They were the first Australian patriots.

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Author's Note

In the official texts, the dispossession of the Australian Aboriginal people by British colonialism is mentioned only in passing. The heroic resistance of the Australian Aborigines against this colonialism is rarely mentioned at all.

Evidence of a splendid tradition of resistance to the British can be found in the archives of all states, in various select committee reports, and in the letters written by the 'pioneers'.

The first Australians waged a significant and heroic struggle against the British seizure of their land. Prior to settlement they had lived in the state of society which was the first form of communism. They had no private productive property and no class divisions. Their head men were nothing more than heads of families. In contrast to the British they had no standing army, no full-time police, courts or bureaucracy.

They were the only inhabitants and they roamed their country largely unchallenged. They developed beautiful art and music forms in their rich culture. They were, without doubt, the just occupants of Australia.

The authors wish to state that they claim no special expertise or authority on the subject of Aboriginal resistance. We have synthesised existing material in addition to producing original documentation. But we recognize that our sources are essentially secondary ones. The primary sources are the Aboriginal people themselves — they are the real experts.

Circumstances have determined that we should play a part in initiating discussion on this vital question in Australian history. We have undertaken this work in the belief that what we have produced is merely the tip of the iceberg on this subject. Sooner or later the Aboriginal people themselves will bring forth the complete history of their anti-colonialist struggles.

Reality today has compelled the authors to accept for the sake of readability the artificially created boundaries established by colonialism. It hardly needs saying that neither did the Aborigines respect boundaries nor did they respect the colonialism that was dispossessing them.

Preface

Historical wisdom is not much altered by the diligent efforts of researchers. Most great upheavals in our appreciation of the past come from social, political and economic forces which call forth new historians who find new evidence as part of a wider battle on behalf of hitherto oppressed and neglected groups.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the ways in which Aborigines left and re-entered Australia's written history. When the battle for control of Australia was on in earnest, the Aborigines were a vital part of the history books. For as long as the Aborigines could not be ignored in real life, they held an important place in the accounts of European expansion. By the time academic history started to be written here, early this century, the Aborigines' physical resistance had been broken in the southern part of the continent. And so Aborigines were put aside, treated as curiosities, or, at least, as nothing more than a natural impediment like fire, flood and drought, which the heroic squatters had to overcome.

With only very rare exception, this continued to be the way in which historians of Australia treated Aborigines until about ten years ago when the Black power movement in the U.S.A. and decolonisation in Africa combined with a renewed upsurge of Aboriginal struggle to make it harder for historians to go on being the exclusive voice of the master race.

This book, much more than the dozens of other contributions to the re-evaluation of Aboriginal history which have appeared since C. D. Rowley's *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society* in 1970, is the direct consequence of altered political facts. This does not mean that *The Black Resistance* lacks objectivity. On the contrary, it speaks a great truth just as the continuing silence by most historians was, and is, nothing more than the voice of the exterminators.

The Black Resistance will have little or no impact on the way Australian history is written and taught. Books and ideas can not shake the lazy complacency of scholarship. That requires prolonged struggle by students inside their classrooms and in the community at large. Above all, it requires the continued fight of Aborigines to secure their land.

Because the continuance of this fight is certain, it is already time to consider the next steps in the re-writing of Aboriginal history. The fact that most history professors have not got even to stage one is a matter of no importance.

The Black Resistance has rightly concentrated on one task — establishing that violent struggle by Aborigines against foreign invasion was an on-going and continent-wide response. The next major task is to extend and deepen this first survey. Clearly, whole books can be written about the fighting experiences of many different tribes. Such studies need to be undertaken. They will consolidate this book's basic thesis while at the same time altering the contours of particular incidents and individuals described here. This process of refinement and strengthening needs to be continued, but it must not become a research end for its own sake as there are other areas which require attention.

Primarily, effort has to be put into the period between the end of openly physical conflict and the start of the present Aboriginal movement, which has its earliest beginnings in the 1930s. For as long as violence was not a reasonable option, Aborigines wisely found other methods of survival, of surviving to fight another day. As just one example, they kept out of sight. When we read of the discovery of a group of Blacks who had never previously seen whites we can be fairly sure that they had seen whites; indeed, they had seen them coming and deliberately kept out of sight. These efforts of concealment were as demanding and as magnificent in their particular way as was the Long March of the Chinese Communists. The story of this part of the 'Black Resistance' will depend almost entirely on Aboriginal people writing it down, just as they already retell it to each other verbally. Of course, they must decide precisely when they want to tell us all their military secrets.

Within these deceptively passive forms of Black resistance there is embedded a rock-hard determination to hold onto what must not be lost, coupled with the lively desire to reshape some of the newcomers' artefacts and customs. What these practices may lack in outwardly heroic attractiveness, they more than make up for by their exciting inventiveness, to which Aboriginal women contributed more than their share.

The Black Resistance will add powerfully to the movement for a new Aboriginal history, to a history which does not dehumanize, whether by demeaning or deifying Blacks. The authors have avoided the racist vocabulary of massacres, treachery and going walkabout which still detracts from some recent academic attempts to write about Aboriginal resistance. This book is a substantial start to one aspect of the movement to continue and expand the struggles which the Aborigines are still waging. Only when the lessons of the Black resistance have been learnt in

practice by all the Australian people will we have an independent and socialist nation. New enemies appear: today, the Soviet Social-Imperialists have their eyes on our 'jewel' of mineral wealth. What remains constant is the willingness of peoples everywhere to resist oppression.

Humphrey McQueen,
Canberra

Introduction

'Wherever there is oppression, there is resistance to that oppression', is an historical maxim and nowhere is it more applicable than to the resistance of the Aboriginal people of Australia to British colonialism. However, whilst conventional western history has generally accepted that indigenous peoples were not simply passive recipients of the effects of colonialism, official history in Australia has not seen fit to accord the Aborigines with a such history of resistance.

The reasons for this suppression of historical fact are not complex. Perhaps in no other place in the world was the treatment of indigenes by British colonialism as bad as it was in Australia. There are sufficient detailed cases of genocide, rape and extirpation to prove this point. To hide such a shameful record it was necessary for latter day British imperialism (through its ideological control of educational dissemination) to expunge the Aborigine as far as possible from its colonial history. Thus, in one sense, quite logically, Aboriginal resistance has been ignored because the Australian Aborigine as an 'historical subject' has hardly rated objective consideration.

Unlike its political attitude to the indigenous people of other colonial possessions British colonialism believed that the relatively small numbers of Aborigines in Australia effectively denied the need or political obligation to account to the Aborigines historically in terms of their resistance.

The forced total dispossession of the Aborigines from their land, unmitigated by any treaties, has made it expedient for foreign imperialism today to suppress the history of Aboriginal resistance in order to counteract the notion of the continuity of struggle, past and present, and to weaken the Aborigines' claim for land rights. Overseas mining companies, for instance, have a vested interest in suppressing the Aborigines' militant past so as to prevent a militant future where their ownership of native lands might be threatened.

Although the Aborigines' historical stage of development

prevented them from constituting a nation, the desperate nature of their fight for survival against the colonial invader lent their regional struggles a 'national' (Pan-Australian) character and created a 'national' consciousness amongst them. Traditional tribal differences broke down in the course of resistance and there is much evidence of unity between local and even inter-regional tribes, forging a common front against colonialist aggression.

The very nature of colonialism in Australia meant that the conflict between the invader and the indigenous people was a bitter one.

Eighteenth century colonialism itself was a product of the development of capitalism in Europe, with the growth of manufacturers and the entering of nations into a competitive relationship over the struggle for trade. The extension of commerce that was concomitant with the 'discovery' of 'new' lands, to the growth of world markets, all gave manufacture a tremendous impetus.

The process of colonialism in Australia however was more compressed than, for example, that in America. Here the colonial process was completed in one hundred years; it took much longer in America. The major reason for this difference was to be found in the more advanced level of capitalism in Britain by the late eighteenth century, America being colonized from the sixteenth. By the time of Australia's colonization, British manufacturers (the textile industry especially) were eager for new markets and new sources of raw materials; and colonial authorities in Australia were soon to realise the potential of the land for sheep farming. Many explorers ventured into the hinterland to report on the suitability of the land for grazing.

It was the urgency of the quick supply of capitalist markets with colonial raw materials which necessitated the methodical dispossession of the Aborigines. Thus unlike in America the colonial authorities did not have the time to dispossess the Aborigines with 'legal' treaties hence recognizing indigenous land ownership.¹ From the viewpoint of colonialism the dispossession of the Aboriginal people had to be absolute and complete, and while the fighting services of certain North American Indian tribes were valued by the competing imperialist powers (France and Britain), the Aborigine was regarded as a dangerous rural pest to be exterminated.

British society of the industrial revolution was based on the exploitation of the many by the few.

In English mines child labour was widespread. 'Lunatics' were

caged in tiny cells, while prisoners were bound by neck and body chains in solitary confinement for nearly half a lifetime. This society whose inequities were so great that the poor were overflowing in British prisons, often jammed into prison hulks, transported its brutality to Australia. The convicts shipped to Australia were treated as animals of burden but the Australian Aborigines were to be diseased, poisoned, starved and shot.

It was sheer hypocrisy for the British ruling class to justify their colonial expansion in the name of a civilizing mission. When the British claimed sovereignty over Australia they were intent on imposing an abhorrent way of life on a people whose native existence in contrast was saintly.

British colonialism was born in Australia with the performing by Captain James Cook of the seemingly unnecessary ceremony of hoisting the British flag and proclaiming the land to be the territory of George III.

By hoisting the flag Cook satisfied customary international requirements and presented the Australian Aborigines with a *fait accompli*. According to the law of the British ruling class a part of Australia was now 'legally' theirs. Consequently, the legal status accorded Australia was that of an uninhabited colony acquired by settlement. Of course, the colonialists knew perfectly well that Australia was inhabited and that these people would have to be dispossessed by whatever means necessary. It was all a question of tactics; of what was most expedient in this plan of dispossession.

In 'legally' establishing its sovereignty over a foreign land along with its rightful inhabitants, British colonialism instituted the 'right' for itself to regard patriotic struggle against its occupation as a civil matter occurring within one society rather than between warring societies.

A despatch from Lord Glenelg, colonial secretary, to Governor Burke (NSW) of 26 July 1837 illustrates the desire of the authorities to avoid the public impression that the colonial settlement was at war with the Aborigines, while admitting privately that the Aboriginal land had been expropriated.

... all the natives inhabiting these territories must be considered as subjects of the Queen and as within Her Majesty's allegiance. To regard them as aliens with whom a war can exist, and against whom Her Majesty's troops may exercise belligerent rights is to deny the protection to which they derive the highest possible claim from the sovereignty which has been assumed over the whole of their ancient possessions. ...

He might have said 'Look old fellow, do what you like with those savages, shoot them, drive them away, but whatever you do, don't declare war on them or let it be known that you are at war with

them. For if you do, then we will have a much harder time justifying the conquest of the country and we may well have to let them have some rights to hold land.'

The colonialists imposed British law on the Aboriginal people for the following expedients; firstly to avoid granting land rights. Secondly to achieve the effects of discrediting the Aborigines as rebellious ingrates. Thirdly to render any act of colonialist aggression as an excrescence — the exception not the rule. Fourthly to divide the Aborigines into semi-civilised natives and wild 'Myalls', in order to outlaw the latter group thus alienating the former from them.

There are countless instances to prove that the Aborigines were not in fact equal with colonials under law. Punitive missions which made murderous example of particular tribes; holding Aborigines hostage for the future good behaviour of a tribe; laws which restricted the freedom of Aborigines, are but a few examples of the practical understanding held by the authorities that a state of war really did exist.

The numerical and technical inferiority of the Aborigines viz-a-viz their colonial enemy made guerilla warfare the most effective weapon they could employ. Their tribal social make up, with smaller family units, was well adapted to this style of fighting. Had their social structure resembled the large Zulu tribes of southern Africa then it is doubtful whether their resistance would have been as sustained as it was. The fact that Aborigines were still fighting into the twentieth century in Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory is testimony to the suitability and effectiveness of their methods of resistance, no matter how socially determined they might have been.

Aboriginal tribes inflicted some bitter defeats on their colonial oppressor, and effectively held back frontier settlement in many areas. Naturally enough, the immediate enemies of the Aborigines were the squatters who encroached on their tribal land. Standard tactics of the Aborigines were to hit at the economic source of the squatter's existence — his livestock and shepherds.

Perhaps the best evidence of Aboriginal resistance is manifested in the policies the colonial authorities adopted to suppress it.

The Native Police was established in the first instance for the express purpose of smashing Aboriginal resistance. But the case of the Queensland frontier policy where the police were moved in first to pacify the countryside for later settlement illustrates the vanguard conquering function it later assumed. Significantly the

institution of the Native Police was concomitant with the introduction of the Protectorate. The office of Protector was commonly held by police officers and as in other colonies they were likely to be involved in punitive expeditions in some areas, offering their 'protection' mainly to the settlers against the Aborigines. In its first years of operation (from 1838), the Port Phillip Protectorate served the same purpose as the 'strategic hamlet' tactic used by the United States in Vietnam. For the colonialist, the bitter fighting in the Western District necessitated the use of the protectorate as a tactical means of exerting control over the hostile indigenous population.

The British colonial authorities were by no means blind to the sophistication of the Aborigines' tactics of resistance. While the military in theory held a technical advantage over the Aborigines through their possession of firepower, the Aborigines had intelligently made use of the limitations of the muzzle loading rifle, by attacking during the crucial reloading period. The Report of Experimental Musket Firing by the Royal Engineers Establishment Catnam in 1846 was an attempt to resolve the situation 'that in actual warfare the efforts of the British soldier against native adversaries in South Africa and New Zealand became ludicrous'. The problem which all military authorities now had to face was the design of a gun which would combine a long range with easy loading; the accuracy of a musket with the speed of a rifle. The obvious solution was the breechloader.

Robert Shannon in *Colonial Australian Gunsmiths* claimed that 'Fears of the aborigines, by no means always docile and the outbreak of the Maori war in New Zealand during the 1840's, led to improved business for the firearm dealers'. The uprisings of Aborigines in NSW, Western Victoria and Queensland during the 1840s no doubt led to the emergence of the double-barrelled carbine for use on horseback. The special interest British colonialism took in improving their weapons in their overseas possessions, and their apparent urgency in developing a qualitatively better rifle, the breechloader, is a significant compliment to the extensiveness and intensity of Aboriginal resistance. It is interesting to reflect that without the development of the modern type of firearm, colonial conquest and pacification could have been retarded for many more years.

Prior to the advent of this sort of firearm, a relatively large concentration of militarily disciplined force was necessary to engage the Aborigines. However, this new breechloading firearm reduced the necessity for such a concentration of force, enabling one or two men to undertake what a company of soldiers previously had accomplished. Naturally the colonial authorities were only too

pleased to have the political burden of the employment of the army against 'His Majesty's subjects' removed from their shoulders. For their part, the Aborigines adapted their tactics to the new situation, avoiding open battle with men so armed.

On the overall context of the Aboriginal people's struggle against British colonialism, the Aborigines were fighting a losing battle against a technically superior enemy.

From a position of historical hindsight it becomes clear that the Aborigines were confronted with two historical options. On the one hand not to resist colonialism would mean physical survival but cultural death. On the other, to resist meant partial liquidation but cultural survival. Simply they were faced with the choice of surviving, but not as Aborigines, or retaining their identity with all the risks attached. It was in their interests ultimately to take the latter course.

Although the historical process had tended to predict the defeat of the Aborigines, it also assured them of a good deal of success. Resistance gave the Aborigines valuable breathing space; it forestalled occupation, whereas in converse, passivity would have meant immediate total and unlimited dispossession. The fact that the colonial authorities had to dig deeper than overt violence into their repressive bag of tricks to engineer ways of placating the Aborigines, was in itself a concession. The sending in of missionaries as a ploy to disarm the Aborigines to the realities of colonialism was a retreat on the part of the authorities and a recognition of the fact that Aboriginal resistance was objectively exploiting the armoury of the enemy, compelling him to adopt methods that would not achieve a quick victory and hence prolong the physical survival of the indigenous people.

It is entirely due to their heroic resistance that the Aborigines are still a people whose dignity is growing and whose fighting spirit increases day by day.

REFERENCE

1. Both the Australian Aborigines and the New Zealand Maoris exerted a similar degree of resistance against British colonialism. However, the relationship between each one's different mode of economy and the common colonialists' economic designs produced dissimilar status for Maori and Aborigine. Indigenous New Zealanders were concentrated economically in villages, and did not present the kind of impediment to colonial land exploitation that the Aborigines posed. The British therefore conceded a Treaty comprising of formal land rights with them.

1 Aborigines and Explorers

The conventional colonialist writing of history has eulogized the explorers and their exploits, placing these men in a pre-eminent position in what is described as 'Australia's heritage'. Portrayed as men of destiny, bravely facing the unknown and the untamed, the explorers have been canonised as the torch-bearers of civilisation in Australia.

Whilst there can be no denying of the overall significance of exploration work to colonialism, the halo that surrounds those illustrious men is far from deserved.

Many expeditions were prompted by the propagandist desire to enthuse the colonial European masses for the prevailing regime and perhaps to draw their attention away from pressing problems at home. Motivated by dreams of fame and fortune, careerists and publicity seekers took to the interior.

Whatever their motives may have been, it is necessary to stress that none of the work of explorers was original; not even second rate, third rate or thousandth rate. Hundreds of generations of Aborigines had crossed the Blue Mountains and roamed the continent intelligently. The only discovery made was the knowledge gained by the Aborigines that the European was an aggressive invader. For the Aborigines, the Leichardts, Sturts, Oxleys, and Forrests were a portent of things to come; their discovery by the Aborigines ushered in an epoch of life and death struggle.

The task of the explorer chartered by the colonial authority, was to survey the land to determine its usefulness for new settlement. More precisely, their job after 1828 was to forerun the squatter and locate good pasture land in the interests of keeping, for instance, the woollen mills of England turning and the capital increasing. Such an explorer was a coefficient of an intelligence unit whose role did not entail conflicts with the indigenes. In fact such conflict could run counter to the achievement of the assigned objectives. From the colonialist viewpoint, the expedition as a small band of men venturing into country potentially inhabited

by hostile Aborigines, survival could only be guaranteed by the utmost tact. For the intending explorer, a crash course in Aboriginal sign language (as it was then supposed), a supply of blankets and tomahawks and a lecture to the men on the dangers of 'gin' molesting were all essential preparations for the expedition.

However, the diehard habits of colonialism being what they were, plus the typical underestimation of the sagacity of the people in whose country they were transgressing led to death in a number of parties. The Aboriginal spear and boomerang found their mark in Oxley's expedition in 1818, Cunningham's 1835, Eyre's 1841, Gilbert's 1845, Kennedy's 1848, and Giles 1873.

In contrast to the nervous apprehension exhibited by the explorer and his expedition, the Aborigines confidently handled their transgressor. Depending on the degree of previous knowledge a tribe (or tribes) may have gained about the general character of the colonial invader, the Aborigines' relationship with the expedition manifested several discernible features. Tribes would follow the party keeping out of sight and mysteriously the explorers would find fires lit around them. Continuing these unseen harassing tactics, articles would disappear from the camp at night and horses would bolt. By this time the expedition would be in a fearful anticipation of a full scale attack. Then during a day time rest, a group of Aborigines would enter the camp and greet their tormented foe. In relief (and as an insurance policy for future peaceful conduct of their expedition) tomahawks, mirrors, provisions, blankets and so on would be given to the seemingly friendly Aborigines. With a newly acquired (but ill-advised) state of ease, the explorers would continue on their journey. When they were least expecting it, the Aborigines' attack would be launched. Naively the battle wearied explorers would deem these tribespeople as 'treacherous'.

What in fact the Aborigines were performing on these occasions was a well thought out strategy of resistance. The above scenario assumed a limited prior knowledge passed from one tribe to another of colonial aggression. Although at any time, numerically speaking, the Aborigines could have overwhelmed the exploring party, it was not in their interests to do so. Like all sensible peoples the Aborigines refused to throw away the lives of their tribespeople wantonly. The enemy had to be observed for his strengths and weaknesses and despite his inferiority in numbers, his strange weapon could give him the capability to inflict casualties upon the tribe. Furthermore, to annihilate him completely would bring down upon them the wrath of more Europeans. Certainly the enemy had to be taught a lesson, but one which would be of

maximum benefit to the tribe. The enemy explorer had to be observed closely, his habits noted for future reference. Moreover his fear could be exploited to the advantage of the whole tribe. Entering the explorers' camp, simultaneously gave the Aborigines a closer look at their enemy and useful items such as tomahawks could be procured. Above all else, these manoeuvres were designed to put their foe off guard and render him vulnerable to attack. When the best moment presented itself the necessary lesson would be inflicted on the unsuspecting expedition in punishment for its transgression.

Resistance tactics by the Aborigines were not restricted only to formal confrontation manoeuvres. In later times particularly, the Aborigines learnt that there were more ways to proverbially kill the cat. Certain Aborigines would offer themselves as guides and lead the invaders into areas where their incompetence would soon seal their fate.

So far in this Chapter a general analysis of Aborigine/explorer relationship has been offered, but it is more interesting to review specific instances of actual conflict and the background to it.

In 1848 the explorer Kennedy and several of his party were killed in northern Queensland. Kennedy's tracker later gave this account:

We went on this day until towards the evening, raining hard, and the blacks followed us all day, some behind, some planted before. In fact, blackfellows all around following us. Then a good many blackfellows came behind in the scrub and threw plenty of spears and hit Mr Kennedy in the back first. [After one being shot they retreated] ... and came back again throwing spears all around us ... The blacks sneaked all along by the tree and speared Mr Kennedy again in the right leg and I got speared in the eye, and the blacks were now throwing always never giving over and shortly speared Mr Kennedy in the right side ... !

From this account, it appears that the Aborigines had identified the leader of the expedition, Kennedy, as they followed the party during the day.

Stuart made his name as the man who successfully 'blazed a trail' through the centre of the continent going from its southern to its northern shores. But his 'success' was a qualified one. He tried twice before he was successful; both times being attacked by the defending Aboriginal fighters.

On the 6 June 1860 during his first abortive attempt, Stuart and his party were attacked by Aborigines whose children and grandchildren would fight the last heroic defensive battle of the

Centre sixty-eight years later. Stuart was forced to beat a hasty retreat. The Aborigines pursued them all night, their numbers increasing all the time as they communicated with their comrades ahead by means of smoke signals. Stuart and his party were forced to retreat to Adelaide. The Aboriginal people had won an important victory. In his Journal, Stuart wrote:

My party is far too small to cope with such wily determined natives ... It would mean destruction to attempt to go on.

In 1862 Stuart began his second mission, this time changing his route slightly. But this made no difference to the Aborigines who rallied in defence of their land and attacked the party. However, Stuart had learnt his lesson from his first expedition. With a stronger team, and armed to the hilt, the attack was beaten off. From this point on Stuart was most certainly followed and closely watched for much of his journey; the Aborigines farther north being no doubt unsure of his intentions. From the Lawson to Attack Creek Stuart found no water — and significantly the Aborigines didn't bother to offer him any.

Stuart was eventually successful, opening up a path for colonialist aggression straight through the centre of the Continent.

Stuart opened the way for further parties, among whom was another big name of colonialist exploration — McKinley, who carried out expeditions in 1866.

This transgressor too was given a summary example of the Aboriginal people's feelings towards colonialist activities. While encamped on the East Alligator River the explorers' camp very nearly became a death trap. While some of the men were sent down to the river to construct a raft the Aborigines concealed by the long grass launched a simultaneous assault upon both separated groups of McKinley's party. It was only through the invaders' quick thinking and superior weaponry that the attack did not succeed.

Deemed as the last Australian explorer, Ernest Giles, in his contact with the Aborigines, almost literally lived up to that name. In the account of his adventures, *Australia Twice Traversed*, Giles relates numerous occasions upon which he was attacked by militant, well organised, Aboriginal warriors.

The Musgrave Ranges provided the setting for his first encounter with the Aborigines. Two hundred determined Aborigines attacked him (at what he called the Battle of the Officer) with the cry in pidgin, 'Walk, whitefellow walk'. Later Giles wrote:

I knew as soon as I arrived in this region that it must be well if not densely populated, for it is next to impossible in Australia for an explorer to discover excellent and well-watered regions without coming into deadly conflict with the Aboriginal inhabitants².

Subsequent battles — Attack at Fort Mueller, Attack at Sladen Water, Attack at the Farthest East, Attack at Fort McKellar, Attack at Ullaring — very quickly convinced Giles that the Aborigines constituted a whole army of natives who were very clearly the expedition's bitter enemy.

Giles in his account of the Attack at Ullaring was obviously impressed by the Aborigines discipline and military preparation:

At a first glance this force was most imposing; the coup d'oeil was really magnificent: they looked like what I should imagine a band of Comanche Indians would appear when ranged in battle line. The men were closely packed in serried ranks and it was evident they formed a drilled and perfectly organised force ... approached in a solid phalanx of five or six rows, each row consisting of eighteen or twenty warriors³.

The parallel drawn here with the North American Indian is interesting and strongly suggests that contemporary commentators regarded the Australian Aborigines as every bit as militant as their indigenous counterparts overseas.

Major Thomas Livingstone Mitchell epitomises *par excellence* the authorised role and function of the explorer and illustrates the close relationship between exploration and the ruling class of the day.

Mitchell, in his own words, was sole Commissioner for the Division and Appropriation of the territory of New South Wales (and also head of the Department of Roads and Bridges). As a paid public servant in the dual capacity of an expeditioner and a lands commissioner, he combined his tasks to serve the most monopolistic interests of the big squatters.

On the return from an expedition into the Wellington district, he finds the country occupied by the cattle of a Sir John Jamieson. Further, he notes with some pleasure that 'the mansion of Sir John Jamieson situated several miles above Enmu, commands an extensive view over that noble stream'.⁴ Returning again from his second expedition he notes that even 'my boat depot on the Nammooy ... made known only by my first despatch, was immediately after occupied as a cattle-run by the stock keepers of Sir John Jamieson'.

It is this very role of Mitchell's as a servant of the squatter class and British colonialism which draws into sharp relief the conflict between his expeditions and the Aboriginal people.

Mitchell, from the outset of his first expedition, shows

apprehension at the growing hostility of the Aborigines. His party killed a native dog and then burnt its remains 'so that no traces might remain of our apparent want of kindness'. His apprehension was justified when Aborigines successfully killed two of his party. During his journey to the Darling, Mitchell's party was harassed continually by Aborigines, particularly those of the Lower Darling region, who defiantly motioned Mitchell to return whence he came.

This hostility climaxed in a battle where an Aboriginal woman was shot dead and a leading man of the tribe wounded.

Mitchell tried to attribute the conflict to the particularly warlike nature of the Lower Darling Tribes. However, this fraudulent theory falls flat when it is discovered that it was the allegedly pacific people of the Bogan River who rid themselves of explorer Cunningham. This sort of discovery so scared Mitchell's party that they encamped in a defensive manner.

The carriage with the boats, mounted on high and covered with tarpaulin, when placed besides the carts according to our plan of encampment, formed a sort of field-work in which we were always ready for defence ... We had thus, at all times, a secure defence against spears, boomerangs, in case of any general attack.⁵

In addition to preparation for military defence, Mitchell was concerned with the tactics of his Aborigine enemy. He feared the unity of the regional tribes and issued instructions to prevent any Aboriginal messenger from relaying news of the expedition's movements to other tribes.

More so perhaps than other explorers Mitchell was rewarded by those in whose service he achieved. The British Government bestowed on Mitchell a knighthood in addition to other pecuniary benefits.

Immediate rewards aside, above all else explorers were made a corner-stone of the history of British imperialism in Australia. However, in contemporary times, their claim to fame would have been a dubious one amongst the natural inhabitants of our Continent. No doubt in future history, the Australian people will share the opinions of their Aboriginal predecessors in their estimation of the explorers.

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- 5 Ibid. p. 338

2 New South Wales

Any official tourist guide to Sydney will relate with warmth the story of Benelong, the Aborigine who co-operated with the then newly-established colonial authority. In deference to this man who so quickly deserted his own people, a place of historical interest, Benelong Point, was so named.

Driving through New South Wales, a host of insignificant creek names, landmarks — Myall Creek, Vinegar Hill — flash in and out of view. There is no eulogy or commemoration attached to these places. But here the real history of the Aboriginal people rests. A history of struggle and resistance against colonialist aggression, which spanned two centuries from the 1780s to the 1860s.

Districts such as the Hawkesbury, Hunter Valley, Murrumbidgee, Bathurst Plains, Clarence River, Lachlan/Darling, Barwon/Macintyre and Gwydir, were all scenes of fierce Aboriginal resistance at various different periods of history. All of these districts held both victories and defeats for the Aborigines but above all else they illustrated the indomitable spirit of the Aborigines who fought to defend their heritage.

In a despatch of 1797, Governor Hunter reported to the Duke of Portland of Aborigines destroying houses, stock, killing settlers and making threats of further attacks. It was necessary, he added, to send out parties of soldiers to scour the country.¹

Consolidation of Port Jackson and its environs as the first colonial outpost in Australia could give the British Crown little confidence. The hinterland presented the aggressor with a determined people who would not be subdued easily; a people who would prove (later on) to check the profits of the capitalists in the colonial metropolis.

John Francis Molloy, a surgeon, reported in 1800 that in the course of his practice for four and a half years, twenty-six white people were killed and thirteen wounded by Aborigines on the banks of the Hawkesbury. Not until the early 1820s could the