

The Black Resistance

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

Fergus Robinson and Barry York

Widescope

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.

REFERENCE

- 1 Farere, E. *History of Exploration 1788-1888*, p. 172
- 2 Giles, E. *Australia Twice Traversed*, p. 180
- 3 Ibid, pp. 222-224
- 4 Mitchell, T. *Three Expeditions Into the Interior of Eastern Australia*, p. 152
- 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, Murray River, 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

rivers close to Sydney be said to be pacified and secure for the colonialists.

A prisoner Powell (who received corporal punishment for his part in the murder of two Aboriginal youths on the Hawkesbury) during cross examination claimed that

'it was the intention of the Natives to come down in numbers from the Blue Mountains to the Hawkesbury and to murder some of the white people and particularly some soldiers'.²

The defence of Powell and his soldier cohorts rested on the evidence which depicted the actual state of warfare that existed between Aborigines and the colonialists and the normality of Aboriginal loss of life. According to his and other testimonies, frequent parties of soldiers set out to kill Aborigines and permanent orders were issued to destroy Aborigines whenever they appeared as reprisals for depredations committed.

An Aboriginal leader named Pemulwoy, distinguished himself in the early days of struggle in the Georges River/Parramatta region. In 1797 he led an effective raid on the Toongabbie outpost and attacked the punitive party sent out to capture him. Some four years later a large body of Aborigines from the Georges River/Parramatta, Prospect Hill area attacked and killed Daniel Conroy (stockkeeper), severely wounded a settler, Smith, and slaughtered many government sheep. Subsequently Governor King ordered settlers to drive back the Aborigines from colonial habitations.

No doubt it was incidents like the above, in addition to the harassing tactics of Pemulwoy and his warriors, that prompted Governor King to station a detachment of troops at Georges River with orders to fire on sight. A reward was offered for capture, dead or alive, of Pemulwoy. King, in desperation, told Parramatta tribesmen that their co-operation in securing the end of Pemulwoy would free them from any army reprisals. Notwithstanding the failure of this blackmail, Pemulwoy was eventually shot and, both as a recognition of his notoriety and with familiar colonial racism, his severed head was pickled and sent to Sir Joseph Banks. Only temporarily weakened by the loss of their valiant leader, Pemulwoy's son, Tedbury, soon provided admirable leadership to the battle-hardened Parramatta Aborigines.

The bitterness one Hawkesbury River settler exhibited towards the Aborigines developed to such an extent that in 1804 he delivered a fraudulent petition to Governor King requesting permission to shoot Aborigines frequenting his acquired grounds. For this unnecessary provocation he was sentenced to a month's gaol.

Undoubtedly it was such activity that very quickly convinced the Aborigines to give no quarter to their colonial aggressor. King, in a despatch of 1805 to Earl Camden (Colonial Secretary) relates the case of an Aborigine who, while posing as a friend to a settler, took advantage of the settler's vulnerability during meal time by seizing his firearm and summoning his comrades, shooting the invader and his servant. This action signalled further attacks on settlers' properties. The very same day another settler's house was set fire, destroying its occupant. Belatedly troops were sent in but the Aborigines were one jump ahead and lived to fight another day — as the death of two more stockkeepers testified.³

The colonial authorities responded to the skill and cunning of the Aborigine militants with the following order, dated 28 April 1805:

... the Governor has judged it necessary for the preservation of the lives and properties of the Out-Settlers and Stockmen, to distribute Detachments from the New South Wales Corps among the Out-Settlements for their protection against those uncivilised Insurgents ... it is hereby required and ordered that no Natives be suffered to approach the Ground or Dwellings of any Settler ... the Settlers are required to assist each other in repelling those visits; and if any Settler ... harbours any Natives he will be prosecuted.⁴

Edicts like this did little to subdue the militancy of tribes like the Wanagal and Wallumedegal around the Parramatta.

So determined were the Aboriginal tribes to the immediate west of Sydney that one band of warriors in April of 1816 crossed the Blue Mountains (from the east) to attack and despoil a government cattle depot at Cox's River.

By May, Sergeant Jeremiah Murphy was stationed at the river with a detachment of the Forty-Sixth Regiment. Faced with a presumably hostile, yet unknown, territory in front of them, the advancing colonialist could not even boast of a secure rear.

The much-vaunted Governor Macquarie was the man of the moment — the trouble shooter who could respond to the critical situation without the traditional reliance on unrequited violence against the Aborigines. This no doubt was the sort of reputation the British colonial administration hoped would reflect upon them through a more circumspect handling of the situation. Reality, however, was somewhat different. Macquarie, in proving to be no more than a more sophisticated version of previous colonial officials added a number of cheap tricks to the existing armoury of aggression. Macquarie himself described his tactics towards the Aborigines as a combination of military force and the offering of bribes to various tribes; the desired effect of which was to bring in some of the more troublesome Aborigines.⁵

The first month of 1816 saw an upsurge along the Nepean River area. Five men were killed and farmers were forced to abandon

their farms. Immediately Macquarie responded by the despatching of a strong detachment of troops into the region. This detachment in turn was divided into smaller parties to serve as guards on the properties of the more vulnerable farmers.

Perhaps it was this upsurge of activity in addition to the attack in the Blue Mountains that provided the pretext for Macquarie's notorious 20 July 1816 proclamations. Firstly, a declaration of outlawry was placed upon those

'individuals far more determinedly hostile and mischievous than the rest, who by taking the lead, have lately instigated their deluded followers to commit several further atrocious acts of barbarity on the unoffending and unprotected settlers and their families.'⁶

The following Aborigines were named: Murrah; Myles; Wallah alias Warren; Carbone Jack alias Kurringy; Narrang Jack; Bunduck; Kongate; Woottan; Rachel and Yallaman.

Secondly, district magistrates were required to assemble settlers and other persons to organise themselves into (belligerent) associations along the Hawkesbury and Nepean Rivers.

Thirdly, three separate military detachments were to be established on the Nepean, Grose and Hawkesbury Rivers in addition to those at Parramatta, Liverpool and Bringelly.

This intensification of repression against the Aborigines, in practical terms, saw a punitive expedition led by a Captain Wallis surprise one Aboriginal encampment, killing at least fourteen and taking five prisoners, among whom were leading militants.⁷

Despite the fact that for the colonial authorities this special campaign of violence met with some success, it was perceived that a new tack was necessary to achieve the elimination of militant Aboriginal leadership. To this end the proclamation of 20 July was revoked to the extent that amnesty was offered to those remaining of the ten militants providing they surrendered themselves before the 28 December. On that day Macquarie had planned a 'general friendly meeting of all the tribes' — a day upon which he would assess the results of his program of pacification and compel loyalty through the force of recent violent events.⁸

As in many regions of Australia, it was not the violence nor the deception that finally defeated the Aborigines, rather colonial settlement inevitably overtook and engulfed them and the ravages of European disease dissipated their numbers.

For the advanced guard of colonial settlement, gingerly establishing itself west of the Blue Mountains, previously held apprehensions of Aboriginal hostility were fully confirmed.

The commandant at Bathurst, Major Morisset, was unable

to cope with the fierce Aboriginal resistance. Seven Europeans were wiped out in the course of attacks on stations and shepherd huts.

As the settlers' death toll rose to nineteen the authorities viewed the situation as so critical that martial law was declared on 14 August 1824. A military force of seventy-five men was sent in to quell the resistance. It is quite apparent that the declaration of martial law, apart from serving an intimidatory function, was designed to remove any sanctions and impediments to the total suppression of Aboriginal struggle.

The initial impact having been made, the need for such an overt declaration of war was obviated and it was repealed 11 December 1824. Subsequent repression took the form of 'mopping up operations' against sporadic pockets of resistance.⁹

No sooner had resistance in Bathurst been checked than a new area, the Hunter River, became ablaze with Aboriginal people's warfare. Lessons learnt from the Bathurst struggle were communicated to the Hunter River Aborigines from the Mudgee tribesmen.

Using Trojan Horse tactics, so-called 'domestic' Aborigines organised the attacks on settlers' establishments.

In addition to the more surreptitious form of warfare, the Aborigines displayed an ability to match their aggressor in open confrontation. On one occasion a party of Aborigines in the course of being pursued after a raid on a certain McIntyre and Little's farm, took up a strong position on a hill, rolled down rocks on their pursuers, and forced them to retreat.¹⁰

It was incidents such as this one, coupled with the death of a Mr Grief and his shepherd, that prompted the settlers into action. Landholders of the area sent a request for military protection to Governor Darling on 4 December 1826:

We the undersigned Landholders at Hunter's River, beg leave most respectfully to represent to your Excellency the present very disturbed state of the country by the incursions of numerous tribes of black Natives armed and threatening death to our servants and destruction to our property.¹¹

Among the signatories was a J. Bowman who in the course of those turbulent years in the Hunter River valley lost at least three of his farm workmen.

The reaction to this request by the higher authorities was very interesting. Mr S. Bannister, the Attorney-General, panicked. He immediately urged for yet another proclamation of martial law. It would appear that Governor Darling himself had little time for this buffoon and lampooned him in a despatch to Earl Bathurst. In retrospect it may well have been the case that in spite of the 'successes' in Bathurst, the Home Office in England regretted

such an obvious manifestation of war against the Aborigines, who, after all, were British subjects.

Governor Darling approached the Hunter Valley 'problem' cautiously. His reply to the request, dated 5 September 1826, made the following comments: The 'Natives' were fewer proportionally to the settlers in numbers. Settlers should not manifest fear to the Aborigines. They should band together for mutual defence. The majority of the signatories reside in Sydney.

These snide comments having been made, His Excellency set about the despatch of a detachment of mounted troops from Newcastle to the trouble spot.

Before the arrival of the troop detachment the Aborigines had wisely disappeared. Their brief reappearance, resulting in one European death, expedited the arrival of the army. Commanding officer Foley left a few men as guards on remote farms and then set about to hunt down his elusive enemy. An audacious attack on John Forbes's station brought the mounted police also on the scene. One militant named Billy was escorted to Newcastle gaol.

Showing no fear of His Majesty's soldiers, Aborigines made more attacks on the person and properties of settlers. Bowman's fencers were attacked and Leth Bridges' station suffered two deaths, with one wounded. Mounted police replied by shooting Aborigines in a skirmish. Threats consisting of exemption from dispersal guaranteed by the delivery up of Aboriginal fighters were made to the Aborigines by Foley and his subordinate Lieutenant De la Condamine. With the normal excuse 'prisoners shot while escaping from custody', cold-blooded murder was committed against Aborigines. Lieutenant Nathaniel Lowe of the Fortieth Regiment was responsible for the hanging up of an Aboriginal corpse on a fence rail as a warning to other Aborigines.¹²

Such crude racist acts of terrorism were to have little effect on the Hunter Aborigines — they were still struggling ten years later in 1836.

The vast north-central and western plains of New South Wales, artificially divided into districts such as Wellington, Liverpool plains, Lachlan and Bligh, were regions of prolonged and sustained Aboriginal resistance. Watered by rivers like the Bogan, Gwydir, Macintyre, Lachlan, Barwon and Darling, the tribal territories of the Aborigines were eagerly sought by squatters whose greed took them beyond the Limits of (colonialist) Location.

As a prelude of things to come, the explorer Cunningham was killed by militant Bogan Aborigines in 1835. His death provided a convenient excuse for a mounted police party to commit

aggression in the area. Three Aborigines, Wongageery, Boreloomalee and Buremall, were arrested for allegedly committing the killing; the first two subsequently escaped.

The Wellington Valley mission in 1835 reported that Bogan Aborigines had crossed the country and, having united with some of the Badder tribe, were destroying cattle.

By 1838 the prevailing colonialist view was that in the recently located districts, no-one was safe from boomerangs and spears. Five stockmen and shepherds had been wiped out and the militancy of the Aborigines had forced the men on Loder's station to quit.

A Major Nunn, with a party of mounted police armed to the teeth, was sent into the watersheds of the Gwydir and Macintyre Rivers. Nunn and his band of thugs managed to murder a number of Aborigines. Although the exact details of the encounter are unknown, Nunn's explanation that the episode involved about one thousand Aborigines seems implausible. The fact that he had to produce the preposterous figure of 1000 warriors suggests the more likely explanation that he and his party surprised an Aboriginal encampment and slaughtered a large number in the normal punitive fashion.

Perhaps as a reprisal for this action Aborigines attacked the overseer of Fitzgerald's cattle station, killing him and two men of a surveying party under a Mr Finch.

One of the most notorious incidents in the chronicles of colonial conquest occurred at a place called Myall Creek on 10 June 1838. Myall Creek is an offshoot of the Big River near a cattle station then owned by Henry Dangar, 560 kilometres due north of Sydney. A sortie of settlers descended upon fifty Aborigines, tied them together and proceeded to execute them. Their gruesome task completed they tried, unsuccessfully, to burn all the bodies. News of this heinous crime leaked out, forcing the authorities to act. Mounted police captured the eleven culprits and brought them to trial.

Present day commentators tend to stress the fact that the eleven murderers were acquitted in the first instance. However, the court's initial absolution of these butchers was only a (rather crude) reflection of the attitudes of the colonial authorities who regarded the Aborigines in general as a people with whom they were at war. When a certain public outcry had taken effect, and the authorities had reviewed the (tactical) wisdom of the acquittal decision, a second trial around specific incidents in the massacre was convened. This trial took the squattocracy by complete surprise. A meeting at the Patrick Plains, fifty kilometres north of Maitland, was organised to raise money for their defence;

300 pounds, a small fortune then, was collected on that day. The biggest shock came, however, when they were found guilty of the crime, seven condemned to death and finally executed on 18 December 1838. One may well ask how did it happen that eleven men were hung for committing actions that a whole history of Aboriginal dispossession had previously endorsed. In answer, it must be remembered that despite the fact that objectively speaking an intermittent state of war was being waged by the colonial authorities against the Aboriginal people, there was a question of tactics to be observed. The Aborigines 'legally' were British subjects, and to allow an unmitigated act of calculated murder to go unpunished would expose this facade for the grim farce that it really was.

Whilst settler violence against Aborigines had, in the past, been officially sanctioned, fifty years of British settlement dictated the need to remove evidence of any irreconcilable difference existing between the colonial pastoral expansion and the Aboriginal people. Thus the prevailing official view favoured authorised police activity against the Aborigines rather than indiscriminate settler reprisals. Recalling the specific character of the atrocity, the fact that the murderers lacked a pretext for their horrible crime necessarily meant an even more alienated, angry Aboriginal population — something that the pastoralists could ill afford. A combination of all these factors, which seriously affected the tactics and strategy of colonial aggression, determined the death penalty for those unsophisticated, tactless agents of colonial expansion.

The dire events of 1838 led to the establishment of the Border Police arising out of the Crown Lands Bill Committee of 1839. For each district a Commissioner of Crown Lands was enacted, who would be the official head of the local Border Police. Among other things, in their role as the Commanding Officer, the Commissioners were to

endeavour to induce the Chiefs in their respective districts to make themselves responsible for the good conduct of their tribes and ... use every means in their power to acquire such personal influence over them as may either prevent aggression or ensure the immediate surrender of the parties who may be guilty of it.¹³

Within two and a half years of squatter penetration, sixteen Europeans were liquidated by Aboriginal fighters. Settler Glennie lost 200 head of cattle speared by Aborigines and his neighbour, Mr Cobb, had lost 900 sheep. It was reported by squatters that Aborigines had become more expert and cunning in watching and hunting cattle; training their dogs as assistants.

In the Crown Lands Commissioners' Report for Wellington in

1844 mention was made of the fact that the Mudall and Gerawhey tribes were employing hit and run tactics against the settlers' establishments. They would scatter cattle and cause herds to leave the runs, attack the stockmen and retreat when police approached — only to attack again when the opportunity arose.¹⁴

As time went on more and more tribes were uniting against the foreign invader. One hundred and fifty Aborigines from the Bogan, Lachlan and the country between the Macquarie and Darling Rivers, assembled in 1845 to attack five stations. Among the militants were Aborigines considered 'civilised' or 'domesticated'. The Border Police pursued them, managing to shoot two and then set up a police outpost on the Macquarie River at Warren. Although aware of the fact that warrants had been issued for eight of their number, the Aborigines foolishly left their retreat in the Macquarie marshes and declared their intention to attack the supply dray which serviced a station at Mount Forest. In the battle that ensued with Sergeant Anderson and his troops, the Aborigines suffered ten deaths and one wounded.

Notwithstanding their constant technical disadvantage and the inevitable losses, the Aborigines did score some tactical victories. A party of mounted police on patrol at the Bogan River in 1846 set in pursuit of Aboriginal cattle killers. The warriors led the patrol onto boggy ground and a rain of spears killed several horses and rendered the party helpless. The Aborigines then disappeared with the loss of three men.

1847 was a year of intense struggle in these frontier districts. Squatters attempted to take up runs on the Macintyre and Collygs Creek which had previously been abandoned because of Aboriginal attacks. These new squatters fared little better than their predecessors. They observed the fact that when the Aborigines congregated in their hundreds at a station known as Gourable for the purpose of holding the Boorah ceremonial (admission to manhood) attacks became more frequent. Three lives were taken by Aborigines during this year. Dense brigalow scrub, which was interspersed in the whole of the area, was an impenetrable retreat for the Aborigines.

This saga of struggle continued well into the 1850s. The militant Aboriginal tribes successfully fought back aggression and contained settlement for many years.

From about 1835 to 1845 the Aborigines of the Murray, or more correctly the Indi River struck terror into the hearts of the squatter aggressors.

Near the head waters of the Indi, William Faithful and the

squatters that followed him after 1836 bore the brunt of Aboriginal resistance on the southern side of the Murray.

However, the struggle on the lower reaches of the Indi and its tributaries is not as well known. The examples that follow illustrate the sort of skill, precision and discernment which the Aborigines mustered against a superior armed foe.

Aboriginal tribes were particularly active along the Edward or Kieiat River, the lower Indi and Niemer Rivers extending to the Murrumbidgee.

Early attacks were made on the stations of Lewis and Throsby at Moira.

At the close of 1843 a Mr Greene's newly-formed station, some eighty kilometres below Moira, received an attack which continued for several days. The attack seemed to be provoked in the immediate sense by one of Greene's leading men striking an Aboriginal station hand during a row in a hut. Quite probably the Aborigine in question was a tribal intelligence plant on the property whose injury only hastened the intended attack anyway. The information gained by this Aborigine proved very useful. When the enemy developed contradictions in its own ranks, as the station hands mutinied against Greene's overseer, the attack was launched. Greene lost 200 head of cattle and his men narrowly escaped with their lives.

Taking advantage of two factors, injudiciously positioned huts and the high state of the river, the Aborigines made an attack on Clarkes' station. The placing of the huts led their occupants to expend their ammunition early, forcing them to flee by the river. The high state of the river itself prevented the arrival of the police who were stranded on the other bank.

Again exploiting differences in the enemy's camp, Aborigines managed to take 2000 sheep from Cropp's station at Gulpha Creek. Aborigines were able to disarm the two shepherds who tended the sheep, owing to the fact that the men had become deliberately careless because of the failure of their master to adequately supply them with rations. The Aborigines spared the shepherds' lives.

Following the shooting of an Aboriginal sleeping in a canoe at night, an attack was made on the stations of Wills and Forrester on the Kieiat River. Two shepherds were killed.

Struggles continued in subsequent years, particularly as stock were driven in parties bound for South Australia. Henry Bingham, a police superintendent, attributed the daring of Aborigines of the Indi-Murrumbidgee region to those deadly encounters with stock parties.

Much of this chapter on New South Wales has dealt with Aboriginal struggles and colonialist repression in the inland regions of New South Wales. However, that coastal belt bounded by the New England Range in the west, Kempsey in the south and the Queensland border in the north, provided a protracted Aboriginal resistance war of some twenty years. The battles along the Clarence River were more than just a foretaste of intense struggles still to occur in sub-tropical Queensland.

As one would expect in a coastal strip not too far from existing settlement, those areas last 'located' tended to distinguish themselves as scenes of Aboriginal resistance. Thus the McLeay River in the south did not attain the same level of Aboriginal activity manifested on the Clarence and Richmond Rivers in the north. By no means, however, should the struggles on the McLeay be discounted.

The year 1846 along the McLeay saw the death of three settlers. Repeated attacks on squatters' stock and property were made by the Bellingier River tribe. The tribes resident in the upper part of the river pursued a systematic plan of cattle spearing. Great losses in cattle were suffered by five stations, particularly during 1847. Judging from a petition presented to parliament from a Mr Thurlow on behalf of certain landholders and managers of runs, the McLeay district received an upsurge of struggle in the mid-40s. The petition of 1854 complained of the scarcity of Native Police protection on the McLeay in contrast to the Clarence and Richmond, citing the numerous 'murders' that had been committed over the previous eight years.

On the eastern falls of tableland, militant Aborigines stole down from the precipitous slopes to conduct raids on herds of cattle and flocks of sheep. These harassing tactics continued whilst the coastal area was coming under colonial subjugation.

It is to the Clarence River district, however, that our attention and interest is naturally drawn.

Two tribes, the Bandjalang (north and west of the main river) and the Gumbaingar (scrub country on the lower Clarence) dominated the region.

Unlike in most districts, a commercial enterprise (cedar getting), other than pastoral pursuits, constituted the first form of colonialist activity. The Gumbaingar raided the stores of flour and sugar destined for the pit sawing centres. In retaliation cedar getters conducted shooting parties, killing many Aborigines. C. D. Rowley in *Destruction of Aboriginal Society* relates how an alleged theft upon a store by Aborigines, prompted the cedar getters to surround an Aboriginal encampment at night and at day-break to open fire and massacre men, women and children,

their dead bodies floating down past the settlement at Gratton. When the boat was on the other foot after a J. Pagan pursued Aborigines for allegedly stealing his blanket, the warriors sensing their superiority (though keeping a good distance) warned him to keep away before killing the man when he foolishly expended his ammunition.¹⁵

Parties bringing supplies to the Clarence, such as Forster's party, were frequently attacked. On this particular occasion, on the Orura in 1840, Aborigines emptied out the flour and sugar.

Early attempts to establish sheep stations were fraught with dangers. The properties of Forster and Blaxland were aptly named Purgatory and Pandemonium. Both were forced to abandon their respective stations. All that remained of Archibald Boyd's station on one southern branch of the river after 1100 sheep were destroyed, a shepherd killed and supplies wrecked, were eighty-five sheep. During the following month, (March 1845), a shepherd of Mann and Hook was killed, and 1000 sheep scattered. June saw one of the runs of Mr Bundock on the upper Richmond attacked twice. The last assault succeeded in spearing the watchman and destroying his hut.

Six squatters — McLean, Fawcett, Irving, Wynndham, Eaton and Hamilton — suffered attacks with heavy cattle losses during that year.

In June 1846 three settlers were wiped out by Aboriginal forces at Heifer station owned by Ward Stevens on the Richmond River. On 6 June a hutkeeper, Alexander Connell, was killed. Near the end of the month Aborigines, employing a ruse, persuaded Archibald Cameron to leave the station and to accompany them into the bush. While Cameron was preoccupied his mate, Roper, was assailed and killed. Naturally, Cameron shared a similar fate.

The most concentrated campaign of Aboriginal resistance on the Clarence was directed against squatter Thomas Coutts. He was singled out for special attack and not without good reason. Coutts was of a particularly brutal breed of squatters who regarded the Aborigines as less than animals. With cynical viciousness Coutts paid the Aborigines who had worked the harvest on his station with poisoned damper. For this criminal action even his neighbour squatters ostracised him. Despite a half-hearted attempt to bring him to trial, Coutts managed to survive but his life was made a misery by militant Aborigines who sought to avenge the injustice wrought upon them.

In his eight years of settlement he lost three of his men, and his stock was reduced from 5000 sheep to 2500. Hoping to elude his 'persecutors' he moved his stock to Tooloom on the upper Clarence

but the Aborigines remembered and beset his outfit again. Finally he was forced to move onto the Dawson River, Queensland, only to see his shepherd killed and stock destroyed.¹⁶

Towards the end of 1850, the region was becoming subdued. The Native Police in the early 50s had systematically rounded up so-called ringleaders with the aid of pastoralists who could arrest without warrant. Of course many of these Aboriginal militants never reached trial; in customary fashion they were 'shot while trying to escape'.¹⁷

REFERENCE

- 1 *Historical Records of Australia* Vol. 2, Series 1, p. 24
- 2 *Historical Records of Australia* Vol. 2, Series 1, p. 408
- 3 *Historical Records of Australia* Vol. 5, Series 1, p. 306
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 820
- 5 *Ibid.*, Vol. 9, Series 1, p. 140
- 6 *Ibid.*, Series 1, Vol. 9, p. 362
- 7 *Ibid.*, Vol. 9, Series 1, p. 139
- 8 *Ibid.*, Vol. 9, Series 1, p. 145
- 9 *Ibid.*, Vol. XI, Series 1, p. 423
- 10 *Ibid.*, Vol. 12, Series 1, p. 608
- 11 *Ibid.*, Series 1, Vol. 12, p. 576
- 12 *Ibid.*, Vol. 12, Series 1, p. 608
- 13 *Ibid.*, Series 1, Vol. 20, p. 857
- 14 *Ibid.*, Vol. 24, Series 1.
- 15 Rowley, C. D. *Destruction of Aboriginal Society*
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 108
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 108