

The Black Resistance

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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.

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.

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 Catham 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 Leichhardts, 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 Ularring — 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 Ularring 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 Commanche 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 Emu, commands an extensive view over that noble stream'.⁴ Returning again from his second expedition he notes that even 'my boat depot on the Nammoy ... 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.

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 Wanngal 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 Grieg 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, Wongaagegery, Boreeloomaleee and Bureemall, 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 butcherers 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 Kielat 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 Kielat 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 Bellinger 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 Grafton. 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, Irwing, Wyndham, 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 Toooloom 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

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