

Tribal alliances with broader agendas?

Aboriginal resistance in southern Queensland's 'Black War'

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Abstract

Frontier violence is now an accepted chapter of Australian history. Indigenous resistance is obviously a part of this story, yet as John Connor notes (2004), the tactics and objectives of Aboriginal fighters are more often presumed than investigated. Thus Aboriginal resistance is generally portrayed as parochial, half-hearted and devoid of long-term planning. The usual image is a handful of warriors pitifully tossing some spears – a hopeless prelude to wholesale massacre. The implication is that Aboriginal groups were incapable of collaborating or of mounting effective, inventive, planned resistance.

In this paper, the author investigates Laurie's and Cilento's remarkable assertion (1959) that during the 1840s-1860s an alliance of at least a dozen Aboriginal groups openly declared war in southern Queensland and conducted a highly effective 'Black War' that temporarily impeded settlement. The author examines whether such a 'state of war' was recognized at the time, and whether there is sufficient evidence to conclude that inter-group collaboration, inventive strategies and broader military objectives were at work.

The author utilizes definitions from guerilla and terrorist conflict (e.g. Eckley 2001, Kilcullen 2009) and identifies tactics, planning and objectives. He challenges the claims of military historians such as Dennis (1995) that Aboriginal strategies were devoid of innovation. Instead, the author notes the use of new materials, a move away from pitched battles and the development of 'guerilla bands'.

The problem of 'Aboriginal guerilla warfare'

Half of Henry Reynolds' *Forgotten War* (2013) –his recent foray into Australia's frontier violence – concerns two pressing issues: 'But was it warfare?' and 'What kind of warfare?'

This may seem odd, given that countless books and articles now exist on frontier

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engagements. However, John Connor (2004) points out that Australia's frontier conflicts have rarely been dissected from a military perspective. This may explain the lack of clarity about the organisation and strategies of Aboriginal resistance.

The problem seems that Aboriginal resistance presents similarities to guerilla warfare: low-intensity, irregular, disruptive, small-scale engagements utilizing natural hideaways and blurring the division between civilian and combatant (Eckley 2001), yet military historians such as Jeffrey Grey (1999, p. 25) struggle to place it under this definition. Grey found 'no resemblance' between Indigenous resistance and post-1945 guerrilla warfare. For example, he contrasted the pitiful numbers of whites killed in Indigenous affrays (usually less than 5 per 'war') with a single incident in the Maori Wars where 1,843 Europeans were routed and 22 killed (1999, p. 31).

Keith Windschuttle (2002) exploited this perspective to claim that Aboriginal resistance was not guerilla warfare. He found no evidence of military, political or patriotic objectives (2004, p. 221) – no hint of clear organization, military intelligence, command strategy, or declarations of war. Aboriginal 'resistance' from his perspective was a crime wave of 'revenge and plunder' led by 'detrribalized' Aboriginals victimizing isolated, defenseless civilians (2002, p. 129-130). It was chiefly robbery and assault (2003, p. 13).

Windschuttle hardly represents majority opinion, yet even Henry Reynolds views Australia as devoid of dramatic military confrontations. He paints a continent immersed in a 'state of petty warfare' (2013, p. 53-54). Likewise, Jonathan Richards' analysis of the Native Police corps highlighted the negligible death toll on the part of the troopers and officers, suggesting conflicts were massacres rather than battles (2008). Certainly the works of Evans and Thorpe (2001) and Timothy Bottoms (2013) – who, it must be conceded, all confirm the widespread existence of Aboriginal resistance – evidence thinly-disguised genocide. Robert Orsted-Jensen's very thorough analysis of the Indigenous losses in Queensland (2011) crystallized this understanding – placing Indigenous casualties above 65,000.

Aboriginal resistance at its ‘place of origin’: evaluating the historicity of southern Queensland’s ‘Black War’

Thus it has become difficult to place Aboriginal responses to invasion as ‘resistance’ as understood from other military contexts. Therefore it may help to revisit how and where the concept entered academic debate.

According to Peter Sutton (2008), the first person to use the term ‘war of resistance’ to describe Aboriginal responses was a Queensland historian, Bill Laurie. As early as the 1930s-1950s, Laurie, along with Clem Lack and Ralph Cilento, penned notes and newspaper articles about Queensland’s turbulent settlement history.

The trio’s concept of Aboriginal ‘resistance’ grew from their socialist-inspired interest in ‘people’s uprisings’ and the combative mood of Australians during World War II. Laurie (1959) coined the phrase ‘Black War of Queensland’ specifically for the struggle of Aboriginal people during the 1830s-1880s. This culminated in Lack’s and Cilento’s *Triumph in the Tropics* describing ‘a guerrilla war’ along ‘aboriginal frontiers’ (1959, p. 177). A decade later, ‘Bill’ Stanner’s Boyer Lecture (1968) popularized the notion and a deluge of ‘frontier wars’ research followed.

Bill Laurie was convinced the ‘Black War’ began with an *official declaration*. In 1843, two escaped convicts – Bracewell and Davis – had Dr Stephen Simpson (Protector of Aborigines in his role as Lands Commissioner) pen reports on their behalf to send to the New South Wales Governor George Gipps. Their report (1982, p.5) stated that as a consequence of the poisoning of many Aborigines at Kilcoy Station:

... there was a great meeting of native tribes, 14 or 15 in number, in the vicinity of the great Bunya Scrub (Baroon Pocket near Maleny)... These tribes vowed vengeance and said they had already had some but were not yet satisfied. The blacks at the *Toor* (gathering ring) were much infuriated.

Eyewitnesses such as Petrie and Russell reveal this ‘declaration’ was shared with a swarm of colonists who had gathered specifically to welcome the runaways’ return (Petrie 1904;

Russell 1888). This was followed by a letter with a similar dire warning from the German missionaries, also sent to the Governor.¹

Thus declaration ‘news’ spread swiftly. Squatters began to write letters to England of fears that ‘the tribes (will) get solid behind the Kilcoy fiasco’ (Lergessner, 2008, p. 203). When Leichhardt passed through one of the affected areas, he referred to lands regained by the ‘united tribes’ and added: ‘now there is *open warfare*’ (Darragh & Fensham 2013, p. 266).

In other words, several primary sources support Laurie’s view. What is equally telling is that the year of declaration was remembered decades after. *Pugh’s Almanac* as early as 1869 marked that year (1843) as the date ‘when the blacks were now beginning to be very troublesome’.² Even more pointedly, business man and travel writer Nehemiah Bartley, who moved to Brisbane in the 1850s, gave very exact dates for the war in his *Australian Pioneers and Reminiscences* (1896):

Many a pretty bush station, where ladies in muslin and silks now dwell, and walk and ride as they please, has its humble mound neatly fenced, where sleeps the stockman or shepherd *untimely slain by boomerang, spear or tomahawk, between ’43 and ’55* (italics mine) (Bartley, 1896, p. 167).

Bartley’s ‘end date’ probably refers to the execution of Aboriginal leader Dundalli which ‘created a sensation in Brisbane,’³ and saw the Native Police finally visit Brisbane, causing almost all ‘town blacks’ to flee the vicinity for a while.⁴ Beyond Brisbane – at Sandgate and especially further north between Caboolture and Taroom – conflict continued and worsened for another decade.

Evaluating civilian anxiety over the ‘Black War’

The literary style of this era was notorious for myth-building and dramatic overstatements. Thus it would be wise to determine whether the citizens of southern Queensland equally believed the ‘united tribes’ threatened their existence.

¹ ‘The Bunya Mountains’, *The Queenslander*, 21 May 1892, p. 987. See also Karl W E Schmidt, 1843, *Report of an Expedition to the Bunya Mountains in Search of a Suitable Site for a Mission Station*, p.5, Acc 3522/71 in Box 7072, JOL.

² ‘The History of the Moreton Bay Settlement’, *The Brisbane Courier*, 23 December 1869, p. 6.

³ ‘Spring Hill – an Historic Suburb – Growth from Early Days’, *Courier Mail*, 2 Aug 1930 p 21

⁴ ‘Moreton Bay’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 August 1855, p.2.

Today, with vast urban sprawl across southern Queensland and a tiny Aboriginal minority, it is hard to imagine an 'Aboriginal threat'. However, between 1840 and 1850, southern Queensland had only 1000 to 2000 European inhabitants. Local Aboriginal population stood somewhere between 3000 and 8000 according to Simpson, Eipper and other contemporaries. When the explorers (Petrie and Russell) brought the convicts and their 'war declaration' to Brisbane, they had risked their lives, having to wriggle free (after severe negotiation) from an inter-tribal group of 1,000 angry Aboriginals – a larger population than Brisbane itself.⁵

The official tally of whites slain during the Black War stood at 174 at the end of Captain Wickham's term, and at 230 by the time of Captain Coley (Queensland's first Sergeant-in-Arms) (Broomfield, 1923, p.19). A couple of decades after the war, the editors of the *Warwick Argus* put the toll even higher 'at least 800'.⁶ If we use the more modest of these estimates, this means one in four to one in ten settlers died as a result of Aboriginal attacks in this period (the population grew in the interim). Aboriginal losses were easily tenfold, but it this does not detract from the fact that settlers had reasons to be alarmed. Brisbane often pleaded for police and military protection – the begging reaching a crescendo when plans arose to remove Brisbane's tiny military detachment:

... should (the blacks) please to unitewhat possible protection could the vanquished seek .. ? ... is it fair and honourable to withdraw a slender guard of some thirty men from the country ...? We hope that in the admixture of matters civil and military, the protection of Moreton Bay will not be forgotten, nor the claims of its inhabitants treated contemptuously. The police force appears to be totally inadequate to render protection to settlers...⁷

Chas Melton, living in Brisbane at this time, remembered the period as the 'hungry Forties' and 'the fighting Fifties'⁸ on account of the numerous 'disabilities' citizens endured from 'the blacks'. He wrote a 'contemplation of contrasts' claiming the peaceful, dainty world of 1890s-1910s Brisbane was surreal compared to the traumatic, rough-and-ready environment his peers knew, where the 'principal topic of conversation' was 'the depredations of the blacks'.⁹ His wife backed this up with her own recollections: 'people did not usually

⁵The population of Brisbane even two years later (1845) stood at just 890. By 1855 this had increased to over 2,000.

⁶'Queensland's History: Non-Politically Reviewed', *Warwick Argus*, 16 December 1882, p. 2.

⁷*Bell's Life in Sydney and Sporting Reviewer (NSW)*, 5 December 1857, p. 2.

⁸'Nut Quad' Depredations of the Fifties', *The Brisbane Courier*, 8 July 1911, p. 13.

⁹'When Woolloongabba was Wattle Scented – Old Pioneers and Predatory Black's, *The Brisbane Courier*, 18 June 1921, p. 16.

venture out at night' on account of their fear of Aboriginal attack.¹⁰ We have similar accounts – for instance from Captain Wickham's Personal Assistant – that it was customary to halt at the nearest hotel outside Brisbane if the sun was low 'as the blacks were often bad'.¹¹ More graphically still, author Rosa Campbell Praed tells us her girlhood in the Burnett district was thick with fear:

...the women practiced at targets with firearms, and the men would ride home with a sinking feeling in their hearts, fearing for their wives and children. Often I heard father describe how each evening coming in from the run, he used in cold fear to mount the hill overlooking the humpy, and draw free breath when he saw it lying quiet and unharmed (Campbell-Praed, 1902, in Penguin Anthology, 1988, p. 352).

Such *angst* may explain why the outskirts of Brisbane were generally fortified. As an anonymous Kin Kin settler recalled, huts were 'usually made' with barricaded windows and doors against Indigenous attack.¹² Others describe the standard windows as 'port holes' that shut like the hatch of a ship.¹³ Walls were generally pierced with augur holes to shoot 'the blacks if they made a raid'.¹⁴

Even Newstead House, where the district's Government Resident (Captain James Wickham) lived, had a 'hidden room' excavated 'just in case there was trouble with the blacks'.¹⁵ Captain Wickham's Personal Assistant had barely arrived in Brisbane when, on account of the hanging of Dundalli: 'I was ordered to get out of the city, as the blacks might be hostile'.¹⁶ During Dundalli's hanging, not only was there a heavily armed guard, but settlers (many armed) were additionally called in from all over the district to surround the spot (Bartley, 1892, p. 1130). Such measures suggest Brisbane was hardly confident in its dominion over the region.

¹⁰ 'Woman's World. Gold Wedding', *The Brisbane Courier* 6 February 1919, p 11.

¹¹ 'Early Brisbane in the Fifties and Sixties – an Interesting Reminiscence', *Brisbane Courier* 18 January 1919, p. 12.

¹² A.J.B., 'Besieged – A Legend of Cootharaba', *The Queenslander*, 6 December 1919, p.5.

¹³ 'Domestic Intelligence Ipswich', *The Moreton Bay Courier*, 23 August 1851, p 2

¹⁴ 'Nut Quad The Contemplation of Contrasts', *The Brisbane Courier* 8 July 1911 p 13

¹⁵ Anon, *Early Brisbane History Vol. 1*, Zillmere Local Studies mss, n/d p. 20.

¹⁶ 'Early Brisbane in the Fifties and Sixties – an Interesting Reminiscence', *Brisbane Courier* 18 January 1919, p. 12.

Evaluating the actual impact of 'Black War' resistance

Thus Aboriginal resistance was significant enough to arouse paranoia, but did this translate as 'on ground' violence, let alone military gains for Aboriginal groups? *The Empire* describes an 'explosion of long-pent feelings of revenge and hatred towards the whites'.¹⁷ Brisbane certainly had to contend with an Aboriginal population that was increasingly emboldened and aggressive: 'they thought nothing of entering the hut or garden (of Brisbane residents) and removing all the food and produce in sight'.¹⁸ This occurred 'weekly – indeed almost daily'.¹⁹ Sometimes hundreds of Aboriginals were involved – attacking in broad daylight, ignoring the occupants, who they threatened if they resisted.²⁰ As Chas Melton recalled:

.... residents were often alarmed by half a dozen stalwart blacks coming to their doors and demanding flour, tea, sugar, tobacco, and rum. ... (They) frequently swooped down on the huts of the settlers and carried off all they could lay their hands on, sometimes killing those who offered any resistance. Captain Wickham, the Government Resident, was often requisitioned for police protection, but owing to the scarcity of men was unable to afford much relief.²¹

Beyond the township and its outliers, squatters were evicted from their properties. Soon after war was declared by the 'united tribes,' 300 to 500 Mary River warriors poured across Conondale Ranges to attack Balfour's station.²² Simultaneously there were raids all over the Darling Downs²³ including the 'Battle of One Tree Hill' at Helidon (which temporarily routed the settlers). Almost all stations established between 1841 and 1842 around Wide Bay, the Upper Brisbane and Stanley Rivers were abandoned in 1843 (Bottoms, 2013, p. 25), – the Wide Bay ones remaining vacant for 4 years (McKinnon, 1940).²⁴

To give just a few examples, the first owner of Maroon (1840s) was 'chased off by the blacks'.²⁵ In 1847, John Stevens on the Condamine River found 'the natives surrounded the hut and... ordered him and his men to leave the station' – which he did. Then they drove off

¹⁷ 'The Aborigines of Australia – No. XIV: The 'Rising' of 1842-4, *Empire* (Sydney 15 April 1854, p. 3.

¹⁸ 'Brisbane's Suburban Beauties – A World of Fair Scenes describe with Pen and Camera: No. XIV: Windsor', *The Brisbane Courier*, 13 October 1906, p 12.

¹⁹ 'Early Brisbane in the Fifties and Sixties', *The Brisbane Courier*, 18 January 1919, p. 12.

²⁰ 'Moreton Bay', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 May 1847, p. 3.

²¹ 'Early Brisbane in the Fifties and Sixties', *The Brisbane Courier*, 18 January 1919, p. 12.

²² A J McConnel, 193?, 'On Blacks' MSS 89/206, Fryer Library

²³ A J McConnel, Some Old Stations No 2 *Brisbane Courier*, 30 Jan 1932 p 19

²⁴ H J Summer, '100 Years Of History In Newstead House: Quadrilles – and A Snake In Vice-Regal Bed', *The Courier-Mail* 14 December 1946, p. 2.

²⁵ 'The First Settlers', *Queensland Times* (Ipswich) 21 April 1944, p 5.

all his cattle.²⁶ In 1848, Mr Blyth and Mr Chauvel after only four days on Fitzroy Downs were ‘obliged to abandon it – the blacks having driven off four hundred sheep, killed one of their men and speared (another)’.²⁷ Between 1854 and 1858, Thomas Dowse and others were thrice repelled in their efforts to set up huts at Sandgate.²⁸ John Ross around 1860 tried to settle Cockatoo Creek but likewise found ‘the Dawson blacks were too bad and he had to retrace his steps towards the Burnett’.²⁹

Searching for Military Objectives

What, though, was the purpose of such attacks? They certainly discouraged settlement and turned back initial forays on both fronts (towards Wide Bay and towards the Downs), but was this intentional or was this simply, as Keith Windschuttle alleged, *ad hoc* pillage and revenge?

Settlers had no illusions about the main motive: their foes were asserting *land ownership*. They note raiders had: ‘an unforgiving resentment towards the intruders into their native wilds’³⁰ and were unwilling to share ‘use of the soil’.³¹

However, finer military objectives were not recorded. We have only fragmentary glimpses, but they allow some perspective. Firstly, in 1844 the Moreton Bay correspondent to the *Sydney Morning Herald* told the paper that ‘from their manners, and the partial conversation they (Aboriginals) have had’ with settlers, it was understood the raiders were ‘determined to annihilate if possible *the whole of the stock in the district*’ (italics mine).³²

This aim is echoed in other observations. In 1851, squatters on the Burnett and Condamine Rivers reported Aboriginals ‘driving everything before them and *killing cattle in all directions*’.³³ Henry Russell, recalling events thirty years later, was an on-ground eyewitness when he described groups having colluded to drive off *all* livestock: ‘*wherever they were*’ (Russell 1888, p328). Even when ‘caught in the act’ the raiders continued this task: ‘if a

²⁶ ‘Moreton Bay’ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 May 1847, p 3.

²⁷ ‘To the Editor of the Moreton Bay Courier’, *The Moreton Bay Courier*, 2 December 1848, p. 2.

²⁸ ‘Colonial News Moreton Bay Wanton Outrage by the Aborigines’, *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal* 31 December 1853, p. 2; ‘To the Editor of the Sydney Morning Herald’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 November 1857, p. 8.

²⁹ ‘Cracow -The First Owner’ *The Central Queensland Herald (Rockhampton)*, 17 November 1932, p. 31.

³⁰ *Bell’s Life in Sydney and Sporting Reviewer* 5 December 1857, p. 2.

³¹ ‘Moreton Bay’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 December 1848, p 3.

³² ‘Moreton Bay’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 September 1844, p.4.

³³ ‘Moreton Bay’, *The Argus (Melbourne)*, 26 September 1851, p. 4.

(white) man happens to come upon them unarmed during the time they are committing these depredations, they immediately assail him with their waddles, and order him about his business'.³⁴

Why would the raiders wish to annihilate all of the district's livestock? This was not the spearing of a few bulls or sheep, but the diversion and slaughter of vast herds and flocks— for example, 1,400 and 2,000 at Ewers Station and Grafton Range:³⁵ or the 'entire herd of milkers and young stock' at Mason's Station (Pine Rivers).³⁶ At times, the attackers moved from one run to the next, inflicting similar damage within a short period.

Equally, food stores were not simply pilfered for a 'ready meal'. They were *emptied*. Crops were 'destroyed' rather than raided³⁷ – pulled up in entirety – even many acres.³⁸ The latter was done with such frequency that the survival of free settlements such as Nundah was imperiled.³⁹

To tear out vast fields of crops; to raid drays (in the case of Helidon sacking a cavalcade of ten drays, with 17 armed bullockies),⁴⁰ to drive off and slaughter entire herds of sheep and cattle – all this required a great deal of planning and manpower. In some cases, prize stock or stud cattle were being targeted, or livestock were hamstringed (wounded) – which made them worthless for fattening or breeding. Other times, the whole herd was scattered into impenetrable areas. This suggests the attacks were aimed not so much as a means of sustenance, but as a means of divesting squatters of food and income. Certainly early settlers such as Charles Pearce of Cockatoo Creek had that impression: 'continually killing – *more for the sake of killing than anything else.....* Sometimes they would take a small quantity – about 20 lb. or so – of the best of the beef *and leave the remainder to decay* (italics mine)'.⁴¹

³⁴'A sufferer by Blacks – Original Correspondence: What has become of the Native Police!' *The Moreton Bay Courier*, 17 October 1857, p. 3.

³⁵ Frederick N Isaac, Audi Alterem Parem, *The Moreton Bay Courier* 2 December 1848, p 2.

³⁶ 'Moreton Bay', *Bathurst Advocate*, 3 June 1848, p 1.

³⁷'Affray with Natives at Moreton Bay', *The Australian*, 25 July 1827, p 3.

³⁸'Moreton Bay', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 September 1844, p 4; 'Pine Rivers', *The Maitland Mercury & Hunter River General Advertiser*, 17 January 1849, p. 4; *Moreton Bay Courier*, 26th February 1848, Vol.2: No. 6, p. 89.

³⁹'News from the Interior – Moreton Bay', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 August 1847, p. 3; 'Moreton Bay Fine Press. Moreton Bay', *Colonial Times (Hobart)*, 20 April 1852, p. 2.

⁴⁰'The History of the Settlement of Moreton Bay', *The Queenslander*, 4 December 1869, p 8.

⁴¹'The Early Days: Reminiscences of Mr Charles Pearce', *Western Star and Roma Advertiser (Toowoomba)*, 13 December 1922, p. 4.

Multuggerah – one Aboriginal leader – stated that the aim of this destruction was to ‘...starve the “jackeroos” (strangers)’.⁴² Apparently, as ‘Tinker’ Campbell summarized just a decade after Multuggerah’s attacks, the combination of dray-plundering, stock killing and pasture-burning was meant to terrorize squatters and reduce their livelihood to the point that they had no option other than quitting their holdings:

Let the pale Jackeroos view his waddy with dread!
Their grass he hath fired, their sheep he hath ta'en,
Their drays he hath plunder'd, their oxen hath slain.⁴³

Thus economic sabotage – which Henry Reynolds judged the ‘most effective’ resistance strategy Aboriginal people developed (1982, p. 113), and John Connor identified as the greatest innovation of Aboriginal resistance (2002, p. 21) – was evidently the objective of many ‘Black War’ activities.

Apart from this objective, we have a statement from Multuggerah to the effect that he would ‘fence off the roads, stop the drays travelling over the range’⁴⁴ – effectively, ‘close the road’.⁴⁵ Also at this time a leader called Jackey Jackey took refuge in the Bunya lands and sent a message down to Brisbane that he would halt all further forays into what is now Enoggera and Newmarket (Three Mile Scrub): ‘... kill any white fellow that goes that road’.⁴⁶

Halting road travel and drays was probably directed at cutting lines of communication and supply in and out of Aboriginal lands. It prevented further influx of settlers. It isolated and ‘starved’ settlers already in residence, and denied whites the opportunity of coordinating defence. During this period, bullock drays provided the main ‘artery’ of settlement – carrying supplies and mail out to the runs, and carrying saleable produce back to Brisbane. It was doubtless for this reason that drays were so regularly targeted – at Mt Edwards,⁴⁷ on the Northern Rivers,⁴⁸ near Brisbane⁴⁹ and on the Gwydir River.⁵⁰ Not only did Aboriginal

⁴²Lack, Clem, ‘When Black Men Routed The Whites A Pitched Battle of the Early Days, And Something About "Tinker" Campbell's Adventures’ *The Courier-Mail*, 16 April 1938, p 7.

⁴³‘Random Rhymes’, *The Moreton Bay Courier*, 24 February 1855, p 4.

⁴⁴Lack, Clem, ‘When Black Men Routed The Whites’, *The Courier-Mail*, 16 April 1938, p. 7.

⁴⁵‘The History of the Moreton Bay Settlement’, *The Brisbane Courier*, 23 December 1869, p. 6.

⁴⁶‘The Aborigines – Moreton Bay’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 February 1847, p 2

⁴⁷*The Queenslander*, 5 December 1925, p. 10.

⁴⁸‘Murderous Abos of Long Ago and white settlers’ savage reprisals’, *The Richmond River Herald and Northern Districts Advertiser*, 22 November 1935, p. 2.

parties isolate and sack drays, but they set large packs of dogs onto the drays and attendant horsemen to harass them (Lergessner 2007, p. 204).

A related measure was to frighten whites off any Aboriginal pathway – especially creek crossings⁵¹ and mountain passes (e.g. Cunningham's Gap).⁵² Perhaps the best example occurred between the hills near Mount Gravatt on Logan Road, where German settlers literally 'ran the gauntlet' and developed sideboards for their wagons to protect themselves from flying spears.⁵³

Intercepting mail men or stealing their mail⁵⁴ seems similarly aimed at exacting control over communications. Certainly the mailman between Stradbroke (where most mail was dropped off by boat) and Brisbane was slain, and another mailman was killed between Nanango and Gayndah in 1851.⁵⁵ Aboriginals knew the strategic value of controlling mail as they were often called upon to deliver notes and letters, and suffered the consequence of the contents.

A final recorded objective was to 'spear all the commandants' (Lack, 1938, p. 7) or similar overseers and take over whatever they controlled. As Frederick Isaacs (a settler on the Darling Downs) noted at the time:

I have since heard, that the plan of the blacks was to murder first all the men at my head station, and sack the store; and then, having waylaid the shepherds, to take possession of the whole of the sheep.⁵⁶

'Picking off' isolated individuals – especially shepherds at outstations and commandants of groups – was a tactic used by Aboriginal groups as recently as the Coniston Massacre (Northern Territory) especially as 'payback' against whites who had broken tribal law. It was quite efficient as a means of inciting terror, as the element of sleuth and 'surprise' put settlers

⁴⁹ 'Moreton Bay', *Empire (Sydney)*, 5 April 1858, p. 4.

⁵⁰ 'Jessie Hunt, A Wayside Cemetery Where Pioneers Sleep', *The North Western Courier*, 4 September 1933, p. 14.

⁵¹ Mary Guthrie, 'By the Pleasant Watercourses', *The Brisbane Courier*, 19 March 1927, p. 23.

⁵² 'Moreton Bay', *The Cornwall Chronicle (Launceston)*, 23 January 1847, p. 63.

⁵³ 'Do you know your Brisbane – Mt Gravatt and Eight Miles Plains', *Sunday Mail*, 28 July 1929, p. 23.

⁵⁴ 'Murderous Abos of Long Ago', 22 November 1935, p 2; 'The Early Days – Reminiscences of Charles Pearce', *The Capricornian (Rockhampton)*, 4 November 1922, p. 47.

⁵⁵ 'Moreton Bay', *Empire (Sydney)*, 24 March 1851, p. 2.

⁵⁶ 'To the Editor of the Moreton Bay Courier', *The Moreton Bay Courier*, 2 December 1848, p. 2.

in constant fear of attack. Moreover, it could be carried out many years after the offense in question. The tactic seems to have been used in south-east Queensland (Connors, 2005).

The idea of ‘taking possession of the whole of the sheep’ was usually aimed at annihilating flocks. However, at Wide Bay and some other spots, entire herds or flocks were sometimes driven off to ‘bush pens’ especially constructed by the Aboriginal raiders to maintain the flocks. This occurred in many parts of Australia: in Tasmania, Western Victoria (Critchett, 2003, p. 55), Walgett (Connor, 2002, p. 109), and New England (Bloomfield 1986, p. 32).

Was this an attempt to beat squatters at their own game, by wresting the pastoral industry out of their hands? We can only speculate, but Aboriginals were often the first and main workers on the runs.⁵⁷ Thus it is feasible that some thought of this option. There is as yet no evidence of the motives for this practice in southern Queensland, but near Mt Isa, grazier Alexander Kennedy discovered through this corroboree song (which one of his workers translated), that the group there (Kalkadoon) believed they could take charge of the ‘magic’ (cattle rearing) by slaying graziers and taking over their cattle:

Our hunting grounds are ravished
Our water is taken by the cattle,
But bullock is good,
Kill and we shall have beef forever!
Kill the white man,
Kill the white man...
We are many and can conquer the white man’s magic (Behnke 2011).

Evidencing inter-tribal alliances

Perhaps the most controversial claim Bill Laurie made about the Black War is that it was perpetuated by an inter-tribal alliance. In 1975, Malcolm Prentis (1975, p. 27) declared that Indigenous resistance in Australia was *never organized except at a very local (clan/ single tribe) level*. Twenty years later, Peter Dennis and others asserted that the egalitarian, non-cohesive nature of Indigenous society prevented inter-tribal alliances and associated military strategies. Their viewpoint has remained the ‘historic orthodoxy’ ever since.

⁵⁷ Colonial Secretary's Office (NSW), Annual report on state of the Aborigines in various districts, 22 September 1852, 52/1, 4/7153, p.2.

However, small-scale societies elsewhere (e.g. tribes of Californian Indians) are recorded conducting separate but simultaneous forays that were pre-planned and agreed upon by a number of their groups (McNab, 2010, pp. 175ff.). Thus it would not be accurate to conclude that inter-tribal alliances were *necessarily* unfeasible on account of the nature of Aboriginal society.

In the case of the southern Queensland Black War, as already noted, some 14 to 15 groups were said to have been involved. We noted Leichhardt called them ‘the united tribes’ (Darragh & Fensham 2013, p. 266). We even have a fair idea which groups were involved because witnesses to the 1841-2 bunya gathering: Petrie, Schmidt and Davis – all give us a very similar listing that in each case equals the ‘14-15’ cited in the statement sent to Governor Gipps. These were groups from Logan district; Moreton Bay Islands; Burnett River; Wide Bay district; Bundaberg; Mt Perry; Gympie; Bribie; Fraser Island; Gayndah; Mt Brisbane (= Mt Cootah & D’Aguilar Ranges); Kilcoy/ Esk and Brisbane/ Enoggera. This embraced a number of language-groups: Kabi, Yuggera, Wakka, Batjala ...

The ‘glue’ for these groups – long before the arrival of settlement – was the tri-annual (or annual for local groups) gathering at the ‘bunya lands’ – a broad area of bunya pine shrubs stretching from the Bunya Mountains in the west to the Blackall Ranges in the east, centred on Mt Mowballan near Bell and Baroon Pocket near Maleny (Kerkhove, 2012, p. 4ff.). Bunya gatherings were conducive to inter-tribal forays because they engaged diverse groups in shared activities for anything from a month to three months, including an ‘inter-tribal parliament’ (Kerkhove, 2012, p. 23) where ‘each tribe would tell the others what happened in his part of the country’ (Simpson 1979, p. 1400). Indeed, it was joint outrage over the re-telling of the Kilcoy massacre that had sparked the ‘declaration’ Davis and Bracewell carried to Brisbane. The role of these gatherings in fuelling, reviewing and reiterating inter-tribal attacks on whites was frequently noted by settlers (Evans 2002, p. 64) as in these accounts of 1856 and 1858:

...it has frequently been a cause of complaint that ... after the dispersion of the grand gathering at the bunya season, many outrages are sometimes committed by the blacks when returning to their own districts.⁵⁸

⁵⁸‘Fifty Years Ago – CXLV: Records of Moreton Bay – Our extract today from the ‘Courier’ of May 31 1856’, *The Brisbane Courier*, 2 June 1906, p. 12.

this gathering.... (precedes) the approach of some devilment ... towards the habitations of the pale faces. The plan of their operations, after having assembled in masses as at present, is to swarm off in various directions, with the sole purpose of revenging for imaginary injuries.⁵⁹

Davies – as someone who had lived many years amongst the Wide Bay groups – was called before the Select Committee into the Native Police specifically to explain the purpose of bunya gatherings. He answered that apart from honouring traditional customs, they were used to ‘hatch mischief against whites’. Davies’ assessment is echoed by Ludwig Leichhardt. In 1844 he travelled to Baroon (the heart of the coastal gathering) and witnessed ‘several powerful main figures ... among the warriors at Burun (Baroon)’ all painted red (war paint). These warriors, he noticed, ‘found fault’ with ‘those who join the whites’ (Darragh & Fensham, 2013, p. 379-380). During the corroboree pantomime, a warrior sang a war song wherein:

...he reproaches those who no longer come to hunt kangaroos, and to catch possums, and who *don't take part in the battles*... His ‘accused’ answers: ‘I do not live in the dwelling of the whites, the whites are angry with me. I have no pipe, no tobacco, no hatchet. I live in the bush. (Darragh and Fensham, 2013, p. 379-380).

In other words, it seems Baroon warriors were shaming others into joining their cause.

Certainly it appears that many of ‘Black War’ activities were collaborative efforts occurring soon after bunya gatherings. For example, during the Wide Bay offensive, several stations along the Burnett River were ‘attacked at three different points *simultaneously*’⁶⁰ in April (when groups were starting to move out from the bunya lands). In that same area (Miriam Vale), contemporaries describe ‘a meeting of different tribes’ deciding to attack the head station.⁶¹ Likewise, on both the Logan River and at Lockyer Creek at this time, portions of ‘various powerful tribes’ were witnessed assembling ‘according to a pre-concerted plan’ and then committed a raft of ‘outrages’ such as destroying an entire maize crop in one night, hunting cattle and bailing up travelers.⁶² Especially after the Kilcoy massacre and similar

⁵⁹ ‘Moreton Bay’, *Northern Times*, 29 May 1858, p 4.

⁶⁰ ‘Moreton Bay Burnett District’, *Freeman's Journal* (Sydney), 29 April 1852, p. 11.

⁶¹ Richard R Ware, ‘Bucca Bucca’, *The Queenslander*, 5 December 1908, p. 62.

⁶² *Moreton Bay Courier*, 26th February 1848, p. 89; ‘Moreton Bay’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 November 1844, p. 2.

occurrences elsewhere, it seemed to some that a coordinated offensive was sweeping the entire eastern seaboard of Australia:

....so simultaneous, indeed, and so general (that)... a belief would be encouraged that the onslaught.... was the result of a perfect organization... From Wide Bay to Port Phillip, the organization seemed to extend, and scarcely a day elapsed without tidings reaching the city (Sydney) of some remote station being driven in, some flock driven away or speared, some shepherd or hut keeper being wounded or killed.⁶³

It is probable that settlers' atrocities inflamed 'joint outrage', forging a sense of united action that petered out but revived again with each bunya gathering. Certainly when Dalaipi – a North Pine headman – was asked to explain his people's attacks on settlers in his area, he spoke instead of injustices perpetuated against Jinabara people near Kilcoy, and referred to the two groups as 'us':

.... This (killing of whites) is nothing.... What a number were poisoned at Kilcoy! ... They (the whites) stole our ground where we used to get food, and when we got hungry and took a bit of flour or killed a bullock to eat, they shot us or poisoned us! Why did the white man not stop in his own country, and not come here to hunt us about like a lot of kangaroo? If they had kept to their own land, we would not have killed them (Petrie, 1904, pp. 183-184).

Evidencing military co-ordination

If inter-tribal alliances were a reality, how were their military activities organized? Eckley (2001, p. 637) views charismatic leadership as essential to maintaining guerilla movements. In the Aboriginal Australian context, such leadership was more likely to be reticent, understated and plural rather than singular (Foley, 2007). The southern Queensland war certainly had more than one leader – amongst those named by colonists were Commander, Cowander (Make-i-light) and Diamond; later Zrombugongo, Pamby-Pamby, Twarr, Wungoe Wungoe, Buckabolu (Lergessner, 2007, pp. 216-217); Yilbung, Moppy and Dundalli. Contemporaries tell us 'the blacks....had been in the habit of looking up to' these figures.⁶⁴ Dundalli for example was hailed 'as their great man'⁶⁵ – at least amongst the groups directly aligned with him.

⁶³'The Aborigines of Australia – No. XIV: The 'Rising of 1842-4', *Empire*, 15 April 1854, p. 3.

⁶⁴'Domestic Intelligence- the Paris Exhibition', *The Moreton Bay Courier*, 6 January 1855, p. 2.

⁶⁵'The Native Police', *Geelong Advertiser and Intelligencer*, 23 September 1854, p 5.

As was also the case on the Great Plains of North America, this was not a cohesive front but rather many shifting factions – some groups (e.g. the people of Brisbane and Stradbroke) preferring to side with the settlers as their fortunes changed, or on account of having in earlier decades secured their own arrangements with whites after a resounding defeat or stand-off. Nevertheless, there was evidently an extraordinary amount of communication between groups in widely separated places. Thomas Archer was at Nurum Nurum outstation (towards Woodford) when he received a note:

...from a sable (Aboriginal) messenger, telling me that two of Mackenzie's men had been murdered by blacks within a few miles of my camp... (and) warning me that I had better be on my guard as they might possibly serve me the same if they caught me napping (Wales, 2000, pp. 18, 58).

At the same time, in Kangaroo Point (nearly 100 kilometers to the south), John 'Tinker' Campbell was receiving a messenger sent by Multuggerah, who was at that time near Gatton (an additional 130 kilometers to the west), informing him: 'the blacks were rising' and that he should not travel west: '*Baal* (don't) you go, Mr Campbell!' (Campbell 1936; Lack, 1938, p. 7)

When the 'uprising' over much of eastern Australia seemed to be occurring (1842-1844), formerly friendly tribes turned against settlers and unheard of tribes suddenly joined in attacks. *The Empire* (Sydney) attributed this change to the speed with which news of 'Aboriginal Protector leniency' was being conveyed from tribe to tribe:

(Protectors') partiality became the subject of conversation in every hut, and on every station. The civilized blacks soon gleaned from the discourses of the shepherds and hutkeepers the facts of the matter, and with that shrewdness in which they are by no means deficient, they perceived that the tide had turned in their favour. The blacks resident on the stations, transmitted the welcome intelligence to their wilder brethren; these communicated it to their neighbours, and those again despatched the news to the remotest tribes. Then followed the general onslaught on the Europeans along the entire border of the colony. These were the views of the colonists whose interests were (most) involved in the matter⁶⁶

Whether or not this many Aboriginal groups were in communication with each other, it is known that during the 'Black War' strategies were relayed from larger to smaller gatherings

⁶⁶'The Aborigines of Australia', *Empire*, 15 April 1854, p. 3.

through a system of messengers (William Clark calls them 'post men').⁶⁷ Frederick Walker, the first Commandant of the Queensland Native Police, found a variety of signals coopted into coordinating attacks – presumably developed from hunting signals or speech taboos (Roth, 1908; Kendon 1988). During raids on crops or stock, sentinels were on guard with prearranged hand signals.⁶⁸ There was also a system of tree marking involving series of marks or chops⁶⁹ and most of all, smoke signalling.

Smoke signals were used to relay the movement of groups of whites (Jones, 2007, p. 99), to bring scattered groups from great distances together 'almost simultaneously'⁷⁰ and to warn of impending attack – as occurred at Sandgate.⁷¹ Special bark funnels were used to fashion high smoke columns and camps were often located near a headland or hillock, within sight of another high point which itself lay behind another camp. This allowed a virtual relay of signals. Walker said this 'code' was used to 'communicate with their detached mobs' and to decide 'the locality of meeting places'.⁷² When John Campbell's party fought off raiders whilst climbing the hills to the Darling Downs, they knew a second attack was being arranged at the steep pinch ahead of them as 'all this time *we could hear their signals* passing alongside the Sugar Loaf Mountain to the Red Hill, some two miles ahead of us' (Campbell 1936, p.19). It is not clear if Campbell meant the crackle of fires or coo-ees, but in either case it indicates the use of signalling hills for military ends.

Assisting such modes of communication were 'insider spies' and decoys – much as occurs in modern guerilla warfare (Grill, 2001, p. 742). For example an Aboriginal youth who worked for Patrick McEnroe at Surat was used to lure workers away from their arms and stores.⁷³

Decoys and diversions were another means. Multuggerah sent three old women out to drive off part of a herd at Windgate so that he could attack at Helidon whilst the settlers were occupied.⁷⁴ The headman of a group near Fitzroy kept a squatter chatting and smoking over

⁶⁷Clark, W. 'Explorer Walker – Organiser and First Commandant of the Native Police', *The Brisbane Courier*, 28 December 1912, p. 10. See also: Terry, M. "'Paper Yabber" and Bush Telegraph – Aborigines as Friends – and Foes', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 April 1942, p. 7.

⁶⁸'Early Days – Abos Fearsome and Resentful but Brave and Kindly', *The Richmond River Herald and Northern Districts Advertiser*, 3 June 1932, p. 3.

⁶⁹Clark, W. 'Explorer Walker, 1912 p. 10' as above.

⁷⁰J.C. Bennie, 'The Bunya Mountains – Early Feasting Ground of the Blacks,' *The Dalby Herald*, 1931, p. 2.

⁷¹'To the Editor of the Sydney Morning Herald'. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 November 1857, p. 8.

⁷²Clark, W. 'Explorer Walker, 1912, p. 10' as above.

⁷³'Domestic Intelligence Ipswich', *The Moreton Bay Courier* 23 August 1851, p. 2.

⁷⁴'Random Rhymes'. *The Moreton Bay Courier*, 24 February 1855, p. 4.

dinner whilst his people – some distance away – drove off 400 sheep, speared the shepherds and pursued the remnant another 70 miles.⁷⁵

Evidencing adaptive tactics

Aboriginal resistance is sometimes denied the status of ‘proper’ guerrilla warfare on the grounds of limited evidence for a dramatic shift in tactics. Aboriginal society, we are told, was too static to combat the European invasion, being bound to ‘highly ritual’ formats of war (Dennis et al., 1995, p.5). However, the Black War in southern Queensland seems to have demonstrated a range of adaptations:

- Circumventing alien technology
- Moving from pitched battle to ambush tactics
- Terror (psychological warfare)
- Permanent ‘guerrilla bands’

Circumventing alien technologies

Australia, unlike other Colonial forums, never permitted trade of firearms or horses into Indigenous hands. Their use was even restricted amongst ‘friendly’ Aboriginal workers. Few came into the possession of war parties, and it was rare that a warrior knew their use or had sufficient gunpowder (Smith, 2010, p. 114). Free settlement was a *blitzkrieg*. For Queensland, it occurred within 40 years (1840-1880) as opposed to 300 years of American colonization. Guns and horses had no time to become deeply entrenched in Aboriginal culture.

Thus the usual response to the alien technology was to attempt to remove or destroy it. War parties stole and hid, or broke or dampened guns and ammunition (eg Campbell, 1936, p. 20; ‘Battler’, 1938, p. 40). In some cases they would plug up the portholes from which shooting was conducted,⁷⁶ or even rush up to the muzzles protruding from fortified huts, seize hold of the barrels and attempt to bend or break them. Horses were similarly killed or driven into the bush (to avoid these being used for attack or escape).⁷⁷ John Campbell recalled that during the Darling Downs invasion, the killing of a horse ‘would be counted by them as a great

⁷⁵ ‘To the Editor of the Moreton Bay Courier’, *The Moreton Bay Courier*, 2 December 1848, p. 2.

⁷⁶ ‘Domestic Intelligence Ipswich’, *The Moreton Bay Courier*, 23 August 1851 p 2.

⁷⁷ ‘Domestic Intelligence Ipswich’, *The Moreton Bay Courier*, 23 August 1851 p. 2.

victory. The tail being taken as a trophy would be whisked in the first white man's face they met' (Campbell, 1936, p. 19).

Equally, raiding parties tried to circumvent the new technology. Some rushed bullets *en masse*, knowing that chaos and mass of numbers would limit shooters' capacity to target individuals. Another method was to attack only in thick jungle or high grass, allowing maximum cover or enabling some to sneak up on armed settlers. Others threw themselves to the ground or immediately slid behind large rocks or trees whenever guns were fired (Connor 2002, p. 48). A similar tactic was to capitalize on technical weaknesses. This meant rushing shooters between re-loadings (Reynolds, 1982, p. 104; Ryan, 1981, p. 114), keeping just slightly out of firing range; waiting for rainy periods when gunpowder was damp and could not be re-supplied (due to creek floodings) or encouraging settlers to exhaust their supplies. What clearly demonstrates the real problem regarding firearms was simply *limited access* is that other elements of European technology – iron and glass – had a quite different history. These materials could be obtained even as discarded rubbish if not directly traded, so they spread rapidly into local toolkits and weaponry (Harrison, 2002). When drays or storehouses were sacked, iron tools, nails, tomahawks, shears knives and metal scraps were removed in large quantities, and traded to the furthest regions. In southern Queensland, club heads were fitted with spikes of nails, and spears were fitted with points made from broken shears or shards of glass – and these were used against settlers (Campbell, 1936, p. 20). In man-to-man combat, knives of shell were 'abandoned ...for blades of sheath knives, or broken shear blades' (Clark, 1916, p. 8).

A similar adaptation was the use of flaming spears and firebrands fixed to spears. These were hurled at white combatants or – more usually – onto the roofs of their huts to burn them out.⁷⁸ Huge fires were also lit to halt progress. For example, when Ross tried to reach the Darling Downs around 1860, Aboriginals set fire to the surrounding fields, forcing him to drive his flocks into the scrub.⁷⁹

Moving from pitched battle to ambush tactics

Despite the assumption that Indigenous engagements with whites were all furtive 'hit-and-runs', early sources usually describe pitched battles. In the southern Queensland war, even

⁷⁸'Domestic Intelligence Ipswich', *The Moreton Bay Courier*, 23 August 1851 p 2.

⁷⁹'Cracow – The First Owner', *The Central Queensland Herald (Rockhampton)*, 17 November 1932, p. 31.

when groups were surprised or peacefully camped, they lined up and ‘gave fight’.⁸⁰

Traditional fighting entailed groups meeting at a set *pullen pullen* (fighting ground) and filing out in hundreds- all in pairs, led by the war champions. The lines would then toss weapons at each other, and try to chase the others off the field, eventually breaking into one-on-one tournaments (Petrie 1904, pp. 44-48, 160-164). Davies records that they were obliged *by custom* to stand their ground when violently attacked, regardless of the context.

Thus in the early years of the war, southern Queensland tribes would ‘stand up and face the white man's gun’ (‘Battler’, 1938, p. 40). Leichhardt observed: ‘the black with his weapons is no coward. Calmly he meets his enemies’ (Darragh & Fensham 2013, p. 3). For example, 500 warriors ‘marched on the head station’ on the Upper Burnett, and ‘with loud voices’ demanded the surrender of the overseer’s wife and then ransacked the station.⁸¹

Thus ambush engagements were a radical departure from traditional warfare. The new style probably evolved from revenge or execution raids. Bartley noted that due to the impact of gunfire, the ‘dash in the open’ gave way to a ‘crafty ambush behind some huge rock or tree’ (1896, p. 167). Soon such attacks were used with deadly effectiveness, for instance in the vine forests of Samsonvale, to attack a Native Police Corp:

.... (they) cried out in English ‘kill the white fellows” and (addressing the Lieut.) ‘you bloody coward!’a trooper immediately fell dead, pierced by numerous spears.... 2 other troopers (were) wounded.... Lt Williams and (his) Corp resisted with determination....⁸²

A variant of this was surprise attacks on outstations. The usual procedure was for a raiding party to send a forward scout to make a ‘friendly’ visit for surveillance purposes, and lure the occupant away from armaments. Anything from a dozen to hundreds of warriors would be hiding along an adjacent creek bank, ridge or forest fringe. These then leapt out and harassed the worker into leaving (killing him if necessary), burnt down the hut and sacked all its contents – for example, at Pine Rivers.⁸³

⁸⁰ ‘Domestic Intelligence Ipswich’, *The Moreton Bay Courier*, 23 August 1851 p. 2.

⁸¹ ‘Moreton Bay Burnett Region’, *Freeman's Journal (Sydney)*, 29 April 1852, p. 11.

⁸² ‘Moreton Bay’, *Northern Times (Newcastle)*, 5 May 1858, p. 2.

⁸³ ‘Domestic Intelligence’, *The Moreton Bay Courier*, 3 July 1852, p. 2.

Terror (psychological warfare)

A less damaging but terrifying technique evidently developed after the invasion consisted of harassment, shock and bluff. We should class this as terrorism, in that it aimed to provoke the enemy, decrease their morale, and incite anxiety (Kilcullen 2009, pp. 30-32; Cassidy, 2004, pp. 41-46).

A good example is this 1856 attack on a home at Breakfast Creek (near Brisbane):

five or six of them entered the premises of a person residing there, and helped themselves to the garden stuff most liberally and unceremoniously, ... defying (the woman) to make them leave the premise. Another woman was ordering several of them off, when a blackfellow spat in her face and used some grossly insulting language.⁸⁴

Also at Breakfast Creek they taunted the pursuing police by brandishing their spears, gesturing and calling out insults.⁸⁵ In other cases, assailants 'prowled about at unseemly hours'⁸⁶ apparently to frighten Brisbane's citizens, or even uprooted building stumps and stamped and danced on settlers' graves.⁸⁷

Similarly provocative were silent 'shows of force' – ominously appearing in great numbers, stretched along hills and ridges (Hoff, 2010, p. 109). Sometimes this entailed doggedly following and harassing travelers for hundreds of kilometers,⁸⁸ or threatening womenfolk when men left for work.⁸⁹

As well, there was parody and mockery (Karskens 2011). Petrie gives several accounts of dignitaries being deliberately mimicked, mocked and tricked, to the amusement of the rest of the tribe. One example is when Yilbung, a Brisbane-region leader, was imprisoned and flogged for extracting a monthly 'rent' of flour from Brisbane's windmill. Upon release, he cheerfully visited his tormentors and stole a valuable tobacco box from under their noses whilst they lectured him on 'being good'. He then gave this away to a gardener for a bag of sweet potatoes (Petrie 1904, p. 169).

⁸⁴ 'Moreton Bay', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 May 1856, p. 5.

⁸⁵ 'Moreton Bay', *Colonial Times*, 20 April 1852, p. 3.

⁸⁶ *The Moreton Bay Courier*, 17 October 1857, p. 3.

⁸⁷ 'Dawson Valley History', *Morning Bulletin (Rockhampton)*, 11 November 1947, p. 8.

⁸⁸ Jessie Hunt, 'A Wayside Cemetery Where Pioneers Sleep', *The North Western Courier*, 4 September 1933, p. 14; 'Local Intelligence' *The Courier*, 5 Sept 1861, p. 2.

⁸⁹ Mary Guthrie, 'By the Pleasant Watercourses', *The Brisbane Courier*, 19 March 1927, p. 23.

Developing full-time guerilla bands?

A final and telling evidence for adaptive tactics is the emergence of what might be classed as 'guerilla bands'. Groups most involved in repeat attacks were enticing 'wild' tribes into joining them as 'bands of savage plunderers' – subsisting 'entirely' from what they took from 'the property of the settlers'.⁹⁰ Despite the potential settler retaliation, they stored plundered flour and stock (Connor 2002, p. 41). Instead of the usual open camps, they resided in 'fastnesses' and 'strongholds' in 'broken and unfrequented country'⁹¹ – often strategically using creeks and swamps to bog would-be pursuers.⁹² Camps in 'strongholds' took on a new, defensive form:

The weapon or article of European manufacture is the tomahawk of iron, doubtless plundered.... Other signs of the dawn of civilization are bullock-bones about the camp. *the gunyahs are so situated that an enemy cannot approach from any quarter without being seen by the occupants of at least two gunyahs.* ... (There are) cattle spears, to be dropped on beasts from boughs of trees over-hanging their tracks...(italics mine)⁹³

In southern Queensland, some five or six areas were repeatedly described by Colonists as 'strongholds' from which 'robber bands' launched attacks.⁹⁴ These included the Bunya lands, Rosewood, Bribie Island and Fraser Island.

Conclusions

The precise nature of Australian Indigenous resistance will require dedicated analysis for decades to come. This particular study found evidence for the 'Black War' of southern Queensland being a fully historic, region-wide occurrence. It seems to have had some effect in frustrating or slowing settlement.

The 'Southern Queensland Black War' manifested elements that equate with military strategy, inter-tribal co-ordination, and military adaptation, even if we have an incomplete understanding of how these worked. Considering 'what kind of war?' it would seem that

⁹⁰'Summary of News – Domestic and Foreign', *The Moreton Bay Courier*, 10 June 1848, p. 2.

⁹¹'To the Editor of the Moreton Bay Courier', *The Moreton Bay Courier*, 17 October 1857, p. 3; see also *Brisbane Courier*, 8 November 1932, p. 15.

⁹²'M. B. Moreton Bay', *Colonial Times (Hobart)*, 20 April 1852; Moreton Bay. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 September 1844, p. 4.

⁹³'An Interesting Model', *The Brisbane Courier*, 8 March 1886, p. 2.

⁹⁴'The Strongholds of the Aborigines', *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal*, 20 September 1851, p. 7.

guerrilla-type tactics prevailed, but of a mode distinctive to Aboriginal cultural practice. For instance, it did not entail massive casualties for the white population. It consisted mostly of economic sabotage, the disruption of transport, and a great deal of harassment ('psychological warfare').

Leichhardt noted that within the groups he encountered 'extermination battles are completely lacking' (Darragh & Fensham 2013, p. 392). Ironically, it is probably this 'low-violence' response that has led to Indigenous military achievement being severely under-rated, even when military 'gains' lasted months or even years. Presumably it was such successes that gave Aboriginal groups sufficient hope to continue their resistance despite the carnage they endured on the frontier.

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