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FORGOTTEN REBELS

Black Australians Who Fought Back

manuscript including introduction
and further reading list

by David Lowe

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To all the rebels whose names were lost, along with their lands...

Introduction

Forgotten Rebels began by accident. If anyone had told me four years ago that I would soon be writing Australian history I probably would have laughed. Most of my professional work at that stage had been in the video industry; writing and producing community service advertisements for television, and working towards a career in the film business.

In 1990 I began researching various historical characters, particularly the bushranger Thunderbolt, with a view to writing biographical screenplays to supplement my fictional film concepts. While I was doing this research I came across several stories of Aboriginal 'bushrangers'.

Early in 1992 I began researching these intriguing snippets at the National Library, in Canberra. Preliminary reading convinced me that many of the indigenous Australians who had been dismissed as minor criminals by white history could have been more accurately described as resistance fighters.

Although I had read about the warrior Pemulwuy, of the Sydney Eora people, it seemed odd that I had never before heard of all the other men and women throughout Australia who had fought to retain their lands and cultures. The common idea of Aborigines passively allowing themselves to be ravaged by disease and then massacred seemed increasingly misleading.

Instead of treating the subject dramatically, as I had originally intended, I decided to write a series of seven feature articles, designed for metropolitan newspaper readers, to tell others about what I had learned.

I researched the stories in depth, using the resources of libraries as far afield as Adelaide and Perth. My intention was not to write a dry academic history, but to draw out the strong, emotionally involving stories that I was sure were hiding within the contemporary documents.

Rather than concentrating on the wider canvas of frontier politics, as others had done, I decided to focus on particular characters of the resistance, and treat them as individuals. This was no easy task. History is always written by the victors, and the histories of oral cultures are particularly vulnerable to destruction. The challenge was to extract the *other* side of the story, from documents written by witnesses who were unsympathetic or even hostile to the indigenous population.

Very few names of resistance figures in South Australia and the Northern Territory survive. This is not entirely due to the whims of 19th century newspaper editors. In many ways the 'leaders' I have selected were freaks in their time; most Aboriginal societies appear to have operated on a consensus leadership system, something entirely alien to the invaders. It has been suggested that there were in fact no resistance leaders, and that people such as Yagan and Windradyne were just arbitrarily assigned that status by Europeans. I believe the situation was more complicated.

In some cases, as Aboriginal societies came under threat, the consensus method of leadership was strengthened. The resistance movement of Central Australia, where well-organised but apparently leaderless groups sabotaged European telegraph systems, is a prime example. In other places however, young, charismatic, European-style leaders sprang up from the confusion, such as Walyer in Tasmania and Dundalli in Queensland. These rebels, and others like them, are the subject of this book. I do not claim that they are representative of the Australian indigenous resistance movement as a whole, but I do believe their stories have been neglected, and are worthy of more attention.

The seven *Forgotten Rebels* articles were originally written for newspaper publication. Now that the articles have become chapters, and *Forgotten Rebels* has become a book, there is perhaps less detail than might have been included if the text had originally been written for this format. Hopefully there is a compensatory gain in succinctness. For those who are interested in learning more about the Aboriginal resistance, there is a list of recommended further reading material at the end of the book.

Resistance figures such as Pemulwuy and Calyute, of Battle of Pinjarra fame, have not been included in my study, as there has already been much written about them. Others, like Multeggerah (who led the resistance in the Ipswich area), have been rejected because too little evidence has been left to us.

You will not find the rebels of the 20th century here; neither the misdirected violence of the Governor Brothers, the quiet diplomacy of Vincent Lingari or the Freedom Riders of the 1960s. Instead, the seven stories in this book deal with a few of the warriors of the 19th century, rebels who fought using their wits and weapons in a war which lasted almost one hundred years; a war for which there are no memorials.

Although the warriors of the armed Aboriginal resistance ultimately lost, I don't think it can be said that the invaders have won in any lasting sense. Like Burke and Wills refusing help from their potential saviours, many white Australians have arrogantly refused to acknowledge, until quite recently, that black Australians have anything significant to teach them. There have also been those who exploited Aboriginal experience to further their own short term aims; the 'pioneering' men and women who were happy to learn how to cross mountains, avoid poisonous foods and find water, but unprepared to accept the responsibilities that came with that knowledge.

By any measure other than the relatively recent, environmentally destructive concept of 'progress', the indigenous peoples of Australia represent, collectively, one of the most successful civilisations on Earth. By comparison, white Australia has managed to cripple itself, economically and socially, after only two centuries.

Sustainability, in both a spiritual and physical sense, has been replaced by the profit motive. Salinity, loss of topsoil, loss of biodiversity, desertification, unemployment, rising violence, urban sprawl; all the major problems facing Australia today might have been avoided or lessened if our forefathers had really been prepared to learn from the people who understood this country. As the anthropologists say: when cultures and peoples are destroyed, everybody loses. Thankfully, indigenous Australian society has not been destroyed.

3.

The Mabo judgement shows that people at the highest levels of government and the judiciary are finally beginning to realise that we must come to terms with our history if we are to put a stop to the hypocrisy of the last two hundred years. Only when we have done that will our country be able to move forward, guided by the collective wisdom of all who call Australia home.

It has already become obvious that this will not be a straightforward process. Last year's conflict over native title, for example, completely overshadowed the fact that 1993 was the International Year for the World's Indigenous People. I hope that readers will find the courage and bravery of the forgotten rebels of the 19th century inspiring examples in the battles that lie ahead; battles against racism, greed and ignorance.

David Lowe, Canberra, January 1994.

1. Windradyne of the Wiradjuri

...By Experience, it hath been found, that Mutual Bloodshed may be stopped by the Use of Arms against the Natives beyond the ordinary Rule of Law in Time of Peace; and, for this End, Resort to summary Justice has become necessary.¹

So it was that in August 1824 Governor Sir Thomas Brisbane suspended the normal legal process and declared a state of martial law in all the country west of Mount York, in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales.

Why? Some say the main reason was to catch one man: Windradyne of the Wiradjuri, the leader of the black resistance around Bathurst at that time.

The land of the Wiradjuri people, one of the largest language groups in Australia, was extremely diverse. They inhabited an oval-shaped area bounded by the Blue Mountains in the east, the western slopes in the south, and the change from open forest to grassy plains in the north and west.² This area encompasses the modern towns of Wellington, Narrandera and Condobolin, and is sometimes called Three Rivers country, as it is intersected by the Macquarie (Wambool), the Lachlan (Kalare) and the Murrumbidgee (Murrumbidjeri).³ The tribes led by Windradyne lived in the eastern parts of this Wiradjuri Nation, connected to other groups by a common language, as well as cultural and trade links.

The first recorded meeting between these people and white explorers took place in December 1813, about five miles down the Macquarie River from present day Bathurst.

At sunset... as we were fishing I saw some Natives coming down the Plain. They did not see us till we surprised them... There were only two women and four children. The poor creatures trembled and fell down with fright... I gave them what Fish we had, some fishhooks, twine and a tomahawk. They appeared glad to get them. Two boys ran away; the other small children cried much at first. A little while after I played with them and they began to be good humoured and laugh...⁴

Assistant Surveyor George Evans and his party had been instructed to further explore the country glimpsed by Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson earlier that year.

Following Evans' reports of excellent pastures beyond the mountains, Governor Macquarie ordered a road to be constructed from the Nepean River to what would become the city of Bathurst. The route appears to have followed a traditional Wiradjuri trading path 'discovered' by the explorers, who were aided by native guides.⁵

In only six months the 100 mile road was finished. Macquarie ordered the establishment of a depot at the other end. Soon after, the Governor and a large accompanying party set out to view the country described by Evans.

The journey took nine days by coach from Parramatta. Macquarie's welcoming ceremony was watched by seven local male Aborigines, including three adults.

From Macquarie's journal:

We found here also three male natives and four boys of this newly discovered tract of country, who showed great surprise, mixed with no small degree of fear, at seeing so many strangers, horses and carriages but to whom they soon appeared to be reconciled on being kindly spoken to.

They were all clothed with Mantles made of the skins of o'possums which were neatly sewn together and the outside of the skins were carved in a remarkably neat manner. They appear to be very inoffensive and cleanly in their persons.⁶

Macquarie's aide, Major Antill, commented on the local inhabitants in a similar vein:

They appear to be a harmless and inoffensive race, with nothing forbidding or ferocious in their countenance... They were perfectly mild and cheerful, and laugh at everything they see and repeat everything they hear.⁷

Three days later Macquarie officially inaugurated the town of Bathurst. Over the next week he toured the surrounding country, by turns terrifying, amusing and entertaining the local inhabitants. On Wednesday, 10 May Macquarie wrote:

After breakfasting this morning we were visited by three male natives of the country, all very handsome good looking young men, and whom we had not seen before... to the best looking and stoutest of them I gave a piece of yellow cloth in exchange for his mantle, which he presented me with.⁸

There is a theory that this was Windradyne, coming in for a closer look at the white chief, but this cannot be established. It would be another eight years before the warrior would become famous in the colony.

Five years later, in 1820, Macquarie's slow and cautious approach to new settlement was reflected in the population figures of that year. The European population of the area was still only 114, including 75 convicts. It seems that the Wiradjuri were prepared to tolerate this level of growth, and peaceful relations were maintained between the Aborigines and the settlers during this period.

Unfortunately, things were not destined to remain that way. In December 1821 Macquarie resigned, partly because of undermining forces within his own Government. The Governor's slow and steady approach to settlement was no longer in vogue, and new interests, under the hand of Macquarie's replacement, Governor Brisbane, soon began to assert themselves.

Changes in the settlement laws quickly led to a flood of land grants west of the Blue Mountains, supported by cheap convict labour. As had been the case in Sydney in the 1790s, this enormous new influx of whites and their animals put great strain on traditional food resources, and even more importantly, upset Wiradjuri access to social and sacred sites.

Out of pain, anger and confusion, the Wiradjuri resistance was born. The elders quickly realised that European sheep and cattle, together with firearm technology, represented the biggest threats to their peoples' existence. Aware that they had no chance against guns, the Wiradjuri adopted a guerilla-style approach, attacking outlying, under-defended stations.

In 1822 warriors attacked a station on the Cudgegong River. They 'drove away the stockmen, let the cattle out of the yard and started killing some sheep on the station...'⁹

More 'depredations' and 'outrages' followed. Wiradjuri warriors murdered convict hut-keepers, scattered herds and speared cattle. Barron Field, a visiting Supreme Court Judge, speaks of finding stations 'deserted by reason of recent plunder on the part of the native Indians'. J.P.M. Long notes that station workers 'were intimidated and would not leave their huts to round up the cattle and bring them in without protection.' Wiradjuri resistance techniques were so successful at Swallow Creek that the large Government station there was abandoned.

Late in 1823, Wylde, a station owner, successfully appealed for military assistance. Soon after, Windradyne, named 'Saturday' by the whites, was captured for the first time.

From the *Sydney Gazette*:

Advices from Bathurst say that the natives have been very troublesome in that country. Numbers of cattle have been killed. In justification of their conduct, the natives urge that the white men have driven away all the kangaroos and opossums, and the black men must now have beef!... The strength of these men is amazing. One of the chiefs (named Saturday) of a desperate tribe, took six men to secure him and they had actually to break a musket over his body before he yielded, which he did at length with broken ribs... Saturday for his exploits was sentenced to a month's imprisonment.¹⁰

There were rumours of imminent martial law, and also other disturbing changes. Arsenic, used for the treatment of scab in sheep, was now being used in the preparation of damper and left out to be eaten by passing blacks.

In another case, on the river flats opposite Bathurst, a farmer in a friendly gesture offered a group of passing Aborigines some potatoes. Next day the families returned to the field. With no concept of private ownership of food supplies, they began helping themselves. As a result, the farmer fired upon the people, probably intending to frighten them away. Several natives were killed and others wounded.¹¹

One of the survivors of this tragic misunderstanding was Windradyne. Enraged at what had happened, he and his warriors immediately began a series of violent attacks on nearby stations.

The violence was not random, as was thought at the time, but careful and coordinated, following the principle of equal retribution enshrined in Wiradjuri law. This is illustrated by an encounter that took place soon after the potato field incident:

Our hut was one day surrounded by a large party of blacks, fully equipped for war, under the leadership of their great fierce chief and warrior, named by the whites 'Saturday'. There was no means of resistance so my father, then a lad of eighteen years, met them fearlessly at the door. He spoke to them in their own language in such a manner as not to let them suppose he anticipated any evil from them. They stood there, sullen, silent, motionless. My father's cheerful courage and friendly tone disarmed animosity. They consulted in an undertone, and departed as sullenly and noiselessly as they came. The next thing known of them is that they killed... all the men at a settler's place some miles distant, the very place where it was rumoured, the poisoned bread had been laid for them.¹²

The attack described took place at 'Millah-Murrah', where a man called Samuel Terry had built his homestead upon a bora ground, (an important initiation place). Similar attacks followed upon nearby properties 'The Mill Post' and 'Warren Gunyah'. Reports in the *Sydney Gazette* mention men being speared, weapons stolen, buildings burned and stock killed or wounded. Usually the owners of these properties lived elsewhere - hired overseers and convicts bore the brunt of the attacks.

While Windradyne's warriors engaged the area north-east of the settlement, other groups of natives attacked in the south, terrorising settlers and driving off cattle.

Revenge parties were formed; although men were rarely seen, one group of armed servants managed to catch up with and shoot three female Aborigines, including two young girls. Despite the strong autopsy evidence against them, five of the servants involved were later acquitted of manslaughter at Sydney.

Meanwhile attacks by the Wiradjuri continued unabated. Avoiding the whites' superior weaponry, they struck at unexpected locations and disappeared back into the bush.

By August 1824, the shy, peaceful people described by Evans and Macquarie were considered by the *Sydney Gazette* to have exposed 'the strength and wealth of the Colony... to destruction'.¹³

Correspondence raged back and forth in the *Gazette* about what should be done. On August 14 the Governor acceded to the hard line and issued a Proclamation of Martial Law. Major Morisset, the Commandant at Bathurst, at last had a free hand to deal with Windradyne and the black resistance. A detachment of the 40th Regiment was rushed to Bathurst, bringing the total number of soldiers to 75. Together with armed settlers, these men now began to murder and terrorise the native population, or as Governor Brisbane put it in a letter to Earl Bathurst, keep 'these unfortunate people in a constant state of alarm'.

Despite the possibly good intentions of the Governor, as W.H. Suttor wrote, 'The proclamation of martial law was as undecipherable to [the natives] as an Egyptian hieroglyph'.¹⁴ At any rate it appeared to have little effect on the activities of the Wiradjuri. The men continued their campaign against the whites and their stock: there are reports of skirmishes followed by massacres of warriors attempting to bury their dead. The main victims, however, were women and children; gunned down from horseback, poisoned or driven into gorges en masse.

Against all the traditional Wiradjuri rules of battle, the foundations of their society were being destroyed.

In October the *Sydney Gazette* summed up the situation: 'Bathurst with its surrounding vicinity is engaged in an exterminating war...' Extermination was the right word. One recent estimate is that between one quarter and a third of the Bathurst region Wiradjuri lost their lives.¹⁵

At the outset of martial law, Windradyne's people had been informed that military operations against them would continue until their leaders were given up, or gave up. For Windradyne,

there was a special reward of '500 ACRES OF LAND' to anyone who could bring him in alive. One week later, the word 'alive' was dropped from the reward notices. Still he was not betrayed.

Although large numbers of Wiradjuri were now surrendering themselves to the Government, martial law would remain in force for another seven weeks, apparently while the search for Windradyne continued.

On 11 December 1824 Martial Law was finally repealed.

It is unclear whether Windradyne was ever captured, or simply reappeared when safe, but 17 days after the repeal, after walking 120 miles, Windradyne appeared at the head of his people in Parramatta, to attend the Governor's annual feast. He wore the word 'peace' on his hat, and knew the soldiers could not arrest him because of the possibility of a riot with so many Aborigines there.

The *Sydney Gazette* described Windradyne as being:

...one of the finest looking natives we have seen in this part of the country. He is not particularly tall but much stouter and more proportionable limbed than the majority of his countrymen; which combined with a noble looking countenance and piercing eye, are calculated to impress the beholder with other than disagreeable feelings towards a character who has been so much dreaded by the Bathurst settler. Saturday is, without doubt, the most manly native we have ever beheld...¹⁶

With so many young warriors dead and the backbone of their society broken, the Wiradjuri resistance had ended.

Ironically, it was followed by another violent period in the Bathurst region. Convicts, armed by overseers against the blacks, became bushrangers, and the Government was forced to hire Aboriginal trackers to hunt them down.¹⁷

The newspapers took great interest in the man they called Saturday for the rest of his life, and constantly reported his whereabouts. In 1835 he was badly wounded in a tribal fight and taken to hospital. Soon after, Windradyne tore off his bandages and made his way back to where his people were camped, on the 'Bruceedale' property.¹⁸ He died later that night and was buried at sunrise.

In other parts of Australia, as the frontier spread, the resistance was barely beginning.

NOTES

1. T. Salisbury and P.J. Gresser, *Windradyne of the Wiradjuri: Martial Law at Bathurst in 1824*, Sydney: Wentworth, 1971, p.53
2. P. Read, *A Hundred Years War*, Canberra: ANU, 1988, p.2
3. M. Coe, *Windradyne, a Wiradjuri Koorie*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1989, p.3
4. Assistant Surveyor George Evans, *Journal*, 21/12/1813
5. Coe, *op cit*, p.22

6. Governor Lachlan Macquarie, *Journal of Tours in NSW and Van Diemen's Land, 1810-1822*, 4/5/1815
7. Major A.C. Antill, *Journal*, 4/5/1815
8. Macquarie, *op cit*, 10/5/1815
9. J.P.M. Long, *Bathurst, 1813-40* quoted in Salisbury and Gresser, *op cit*, p.19
10. *Sydney Gazette*, 8/1/1824
11. Salisbury and Gresser, *op cit*, p.22
12. W.H. Suttor, quoted in Salisbury and Gresser, *op cit*, p.22
13. *Sydney Gazette*, 5/8/1824
14. W.H. Suttor, *Australian Stories Retold and Sketches of Country Life*, Bathurst: Glyndwr Whalan, 1887, p.45
15. Read, *op cit*, p.10
16. *Sydney Gazette*, 30/12/1824
17. Salisbury and Gresser, *op cit*, p.39
18. *ibid*, p.43

2. Musquito and the Black Banditti

Perhaps, taken collectively, the sable Natives of this Colony are the most peaceable creatures in the universe. Certainly so taken they have never committed any acts of cruelty, or even resisted the whites, unless when insufferably goaded by provocation. The only tribe who have done any mischief were corrupted by Musquito, a Sydney black, who with much and perverted cunning, taught them a portion of his own villainy, and incited them after a time to join in his delinquencies. [*Hobart Town Gazette*, 1824].

The post-contact history of Tasmania is not just a microcosm of that of the mainland. One difference is the response of the indigenous people to the white invasion. At first the only recorded violence towards whites was minor and retaliatory. Bushrangers were a more significant threat. The 'Black War', when it finally came in the mid 1820s, was led by 'civilised natives', and appears to have been sparked by the execution of a black outlaw called Musquito, who was actually from New South Wales.

The first record of Musquito comes from 1802, when he was seen at Port Jackson by members of the Baudin Expedition, one of whom painted his portrait. Associating with convicts, Musquito

...became an English scholar in our national vices of drinking and swearing, as well as in the employment of our tongue.¹

Three years later he was deported to Norfolk Island, on suspicion of murder. From there, in 1813, Musquito was sent to Van Diemen's Land, where he was used by the Government to track down bushrangers. In the language of the day, 'he made an admirable bloodhound', and during this period Musquito stayed out of trouble with the law, apart from 'striking down a convict who reviled him'.²

It appears, however, that his services were neither appreciated nor properly rewarded, and in 1818 he absconded from government service and joined a group of Hobart Aborigines called the Tame Mob. These were people who had either been exiled from their tribes in the interior, or who had left of their own accord. In 1822 a Reverend Horton reported that 'Muskitoo'³ was leading the Mob. This in itself was an unusual thing among the equality-loving Tasmanians, and perhaps a sign of what was to come.

After several women from the Mob were stolen by whites, Musquito and his followers became involved in the killing of settlers in the Oyster Bay area, between Oatlands and the Freycinet Peninsula.

He would lurk about, gain information, lay his plans in a skilful manner, and then, from his retreat, despatch his band to carry on the warfare... his people kept the land in a constant state of terror.⁴

The white community soon put a price on Musquito's head, but it appears that the local tribes did not always approve of this outsider either. There are tales of the guerilla leader being nearly beaten to death with waddies, for instance. Nonetheless, this man with a 'profound love of excitement and mischief' appears to have been highly charismatic, and Musquito attracted many followers during this period.

Although not all of the ‘outrages’ attributed to Musquito could possibly have been committed by him, most sources agree that he and his group were responsible for many acts of war against the settlers at this time. There are first-hand reports that he ‘encouraged and excited the [Van Diemen's Land] aborigines to kill the white men’ saying, ‘kill DRYER, kill LUTERTEWIN [whites]’.⁵

In December 1824 Musquito was shot in the groin and captured by an Aboriginal man named Teague or Tegg, who had been promised (though he did not receive) a boat for his efforts.

Without defence counsel, the Sydney man was brought to trial together with a Tasmanian native called Black Jack, about whom nothing else is known. They were charged with the murder of William Hollyoak, at Grindstone Bay, one year before. It appears that neither man had very much idea what the proceedings were about. Musquito was nonetheless found guilty, and Black Jack not guilty. A few months later Jack was found guilty of another murder, and the pair were hanged along with six bushrangers at the end of Macquarie Street, beneath the ramparts of Mount Wellington. The following exchange was recorded by Henry Melville:

Musquito, in conversation with Mr Bisdee, the gaoler... said, ‘Hanging no good for black fellow.’
Mr Bisdee: ‘Why not as good for black fellow as for white fellow, if he kills a man?’
Musquito: ‘Very good for white fellow, for *he* used to it’.⁶

Melville argued that Musquito meant that his execution was useless as an example to the other blacks, although whites, by custom, understood the idea of men being hanged as an example to others.

Historians remain divided on the question of whether Musquito was a true resistance figure or just a murderous psychopath; both towards whites and other Aborigines. Thirteen years after the execution, Protector of Aborigines George Robinson blamed the authorities:

The whites have occasioned the greatest misery to these poor people... not only by importing the depraved of their own species, but also that of the Sydney Aborigines. Muskeeto... murdered several at Sydney and was sent here to be out of the way. What a policy!⁷

Whichever way you look at it, Musquito had a profound effect on the subsequent Tasmanian resistance. Not only was his execution followed by a number of revenge attacks upon Europeans, but his guerilla tactics were borrowed by warrior leaders in other districts and used to great effect.

Governor Arthur replaced Sorell on 14 May 1824.

Early in 1825, a peaceful party of Aborigines visiting Launceston were fired upon. As they tried to flee, ‘one of the native women was used in a manner which, for brutality, beggars description’.⁸ Arthur had the culprits flogged, but the incident was followed soon after by an attack upon two sawyers at Lake River, by the same tribe, with spears and waddies.

In 1826 the violence went up another notch, when there were a number of attacks led by Tom Birch, dubbed Black Tom by the press. Birch's real name was Kickerterpoller. He was a native

of Oyster Bay, kidnapped as a child and brought up as if white by a wealthy property owner called Thomas William Birch.

When the boy reached maturity, he absconded and led the local Aborigines in attacks upon the settlers. Contemporary writers suggested that Tom was corrupted by Musquito, either in person or by example, but it seems equally likely that the young man simply found adult white society to have no place for him as an equal.

Kickerterpoller was particularly hated by the whites because he used his knowledge of European ways to plan attacks. Not only that, but his rejection of the 'civilised' way of life was seen as a traitorous slap in the face.

Meanwhile three more Tasmanian Aborigines had been tried and executed by British justice. Constable Gilbert Robertson, when asked by the Chief Justice if he considered 'that those men who were tried and executed here were murdered,' replied: 'I do indeed, Your Honour'.⁹

By November the war was on in earnest. Large headlines in the *Colonial Times* announced 'DREADFUL MURDERS BY THE BLACK NATIVES', and there were calls for Black Tom to be apprehended and 'immediately gibbeted on the very spot...'

One month later the *Colonial Times* stated that:

Self defence is the first law of nature. The Government must remove the natives - if not they will be hunted down like wild beasts, and destroyed!¹⁰

Talk of wholesale removal of the remaining Aboriginal population to the mainland or another island was now being considered seriously as a 'solution' to the native problem.

With more and more 'civilised blacks' taking to the bush, Governor Arthur issued a proclamation urging 'the need to capture certain natives who, making use of what they had learnt in previous intercourse with Europeans, were said to be directing attacks upon the settlers'.¹¹

Black Tom was captured in November 1827. After the proclamation of martial law the following year, he was assigned to Gilbert Robertson's civilian party to assist in hunting down his own people.

Arthur's next step was to order the Aborigines to withdraw from all settled districts. This effectively gave a green light to illegal attacks upon groups of Aborigines, and led to three years of carnage; the blacks fighting for their survival, the whites for what they considered to be their hard won land. Numerous accounts of attacks by blacks on whites exist, not just on outlying properties, but close to major settlements like Hobart and New Norfolk. Violence towards the Aborigines was not generally recorded, although armed military and civilian parties were both active against them during this period.

Rewards for the capture of live children and adult natives came into effect in February 1830. Many people appear to have died attempting to prevent the kidnapping of family members. Soon after, a shadowy new resistance leader appeared in the north west of the island:

...two sealers... told me of the amazon named WALYER that headed a tribe and would stand on a hill and give orders to the natives when to attack the whites, calling them bad names and telling them to come out and they would spear them.¹²

The emergence of such a female leader, at the time an unprecedented event, says much about the way Tasmanian Aboriginal society was breaking down. Throughout the island the traditional power structure was collapsing. Strong individual personalities were increasingly coming to the fore; it seemed anyone with the charisma to lead could do so. Like Musquito and Black Tom before her, this woman, sometimes known as Tarereenore, had had extensive experience with Europeans.

Walyer was originally captured by the sealers as a slave for sexual purposes (Tarereenore actually meant sealer's woman). She used her time with these men to learn English and to master modern weapons. Returning to her people, she amassed a band of eight warriors about her, and began to attack white settlements. Walyer 'boasted... how she had taught the black fellows to load and fire off a musket, and instructed them how to kill plenty of white people...'¹³ The record is sketchy, but Walyer appears to have behaved quite ruthlessly towards white and black alike. There are reports of her threatening and murdering rival tribal groups by subterfuge. When Walyer was recaptured it was considered to be

...a matter of considerable importance to the peace and tranquillity of those districts where she and her formidable coadjutors had made themselves so conspicuous in their wanton and barbarous aggression.¹⁴

In 1832 Walyer escaped, and was once again a terror to the area.

She carried a little fowling piece and would fire at the white men's huts and call them to come out and the blackfellows would spear them...¹⁵

Shortly afterwards, the woman who had said she 'liked a white man as she did a black snake'¹⁶ disappears from the record. There is a vague report of her being speared in the back by another Aborigine, but it is inconclusive. And so it was that the resistance in Tasmania faded away.

Although Governor Arthur's 'Black Line', a grandiose military-style plan to round up the remaining native population, was an abject failure, missionaries finished the job that disease and legally sanctioned genocide had begun, removing the surviving Aboriginal population to Flinders Island.

In 1835 Melville remarked that, 'not one single individual was ever brought to a Court of Justice for offences committed against these harmless creatures'.¹⁷

This is still true today.

NOTES

1. J. Bonwick, *The Last of the Tasmanians; or, the Black War of Van Diemen's Land*, London: Sampson Low, 1870, p.92

2. C. Turnbull, *Black War: the Extermination of the Tasmanian Aborigines*, Melbourne: Cheshire, 1948, p.62
3. Bonwick, *op cit*, p.93
4. *ibid*, p.95
5. G.A. Robinson, *Journal*, 3/10/1837
6. H. Melville, *The History of the Island of Van Diemen's Land From the Year 1824 to 1835 Inclusive*, London: Smith & Elder, 1835, p.35
7. Robinson, *op cit*, 2/10/1837
8. *The Tasmanian*, 12/1/1825
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3. Yagan of the Nyungar

You have seized upon a land that is not yours. Beware, and do not as a people, add to this the guilt of dipping your hands in the blood of those whom you have spoiled of their country. [Early Swan River settler Robert Lyon, quoted in *Swan River Papers* 10/110].

Most of the names of those who resisted the invasion of the Australian continent have been lost. Some were simply ignored by white historians, others were relegated to the status of minor criminals. There is also a third category; resistance figures who had so much said and written about them that their place in history at the time must have seemed assured. Such a man is Yagan of the Nyungar people, and yet even his name seems to have been all but forgotten.

The Nyungar people lived, and continue to live, in the great fertile region stretching from Geraldton to Esperance, in south-western Western Australia. Modern cities in this area include Perth, Fremantle and Albany.

The first recorded European sighting of this coast was in 1616, by Dutchman Dirk Hartog, who left a pewter plate nailed to a tree. Later visitors came mostly by accident, and it was not until 1697 that a full-scale landing on the WA mainland took place. In January of that year Willem de Vlamingh and eighty-six others landed on Cottesloe Beach and tramped inland in an attempt to meet those responsible for the campfires they had seen from sea. The Nyungar withdrew ahead of them, and after a month of bellyaches and heat the Dutch gave up and sailed away again.

Further north, in 1699, the English pirate Dampier arrived near what is now Port Hedland and attempted to use the local people as slave labour. Their unwillingness to play this role led to an Englishman being speared and an Aborigine shot dead, all of which apparently confirmed Dampier's earlier stated view that these were the 'miserablest People in the world'.¹

102 years later, Matthew Flinders, in the *Investigator*, finally managed to attract enough Nyungar curiosity for the first friendly meeting between these people and English sailors to occur. Gifts were exchanged, and the white men sailed away in peace.

Over the next few years there were friendly visits to the West Australian coast by various French and English expeditions. More ominously, gangs of sealers from Bass Strait began to raid Nyungar women and children.

In 1829, anxious to move before the French, the British Government decided to establish a colony in Western Australia. A site on the Swan River was chosen as the place for a town, and Captain James Stirling was appointed Lieutenant Governor. The warship HMS *Challenger* arrived and anchored in the mouth of the Swan River in April 1829. Its captain, Charles Fremantle, was instructed to 'be constantly on the alert to prevent surprise from the natives and especially to be very guarded with respect to the women'.²

Although Fremantle had theoretically taken possession of the whole west coast for the British crown, he and the men under his command appear to have had an amicable relationship with the Nyungar during this period, based on mutual trade. At one time Fremantle actually traded his captain's hat for a string of possum furs!³

From June to December 1829, nineteen immigrant ships arrived at the Swan River. Buildings went up and fertile areas quickly became occupied. Surprisingly, the Nyungar appear to have tolerated these enormous changes - about which they were never consulted - for the first year of settlement.

This tolerance seems to have been largely due to an elder of the Perth (Boorloo) area named Yellagonga, who originally camped on the sloping hill Byerbup, high above the settlement. He was displaced by soldiers of the 63rd regiment. Despite this treatment Yellagonga, the 'King of Perth', attempted to cooperate with the English. He was rewarded by seeing himself and his people reduced to beggar status within a few years, although the *Perth Gazette* acknowledged that to Yellagonga 'the settlers are greatly indebted for the protection of their lives and property'.⁴

Another major factor in the acceptance of the settlers at first was the Nyungar belief known as Djanga, which held that the whites were the ghosts of dead loved ones, recognisable by scars and other physical features.

When the clash did come, it was a collision of two philosophies concerning the land; as something to be owned, or something to be shared. Simple misunderstandings also played a part.

Late in the first year of colonisation, in what was seen at the time as deliberate vandalism, the Nyungar began setting fire to the land around the fledgling settlement.

This annual firestick farming, as it was known, made it easier to hunt game, encouraged new growth, and increased soil fertility. Unfortunately it also posed a serious threat to the homesteads and livelihood of settlers. The farming aspirations of the new arrivals, already in trouble due to the strange climate and soils, were now threatened with disaster.

Meanwhile traditional Nyungar food sources were also becoming depleted due to the whites' activities. Isolated attacks on European livestock became more common, and several new troop garrisons were established throughout the colony to protect the settlers and their animals. It is at this critical point in Western Australia's post-contact history that Yagan enters the record.

In December 1831 a servant of a settler called Archibald Butler ambushed and shot dead one of a group of Nyungar people who were taking potatoes from his master's garden. Shortly afterwards, a band of Nyungar led by Yagan and his father, Midgegooroo, returned and besieged the farmhouse where the incident had happened. A man called Enion Entwistle and his two sons were inside. Entwistle's sons hid under the bed while the Aborigines smashed at the mud walls of the house with their weapons. For some reason Entwistle opened the door.

His young son later described what happened:

I saw the tall native, called Yagan, throw the first spear which entered my father's breast and another native, Midgegooroo, threw the second spear which brought my father to the ground.⁵

Though their father died, the boys somehow escaped detection and survived.

In June 1832 two more servants of Butler were attacked by Yagan and his party. One escaped, but a man named Gaze was killed. Yagan was now declared an outlaw, with a price upon his head.

The tempo of attacks and reprisals grew in intensity. By late 1832 there were fears of a full scale attack upon Perth and Fremantle, and food depots were established at outlying areas to reduce the number of Nyungar coming into the towns. Some pioneer settlers doubted the ability of the military to repel such an attack if it came, and proposed vigilante-style alternatives:

There are always in my office, sixty stand of arms, with full supply of ammunition, for those who may require it, ready to inflict a prompt and heavy punishment on the natives should their conduct at any time be considered to deserve it.⁶

Yagan also remained in the news. The *Perth Gazette* refers to ‘the reckless daring of this desperado who sets his life at a pin's fee... [who] is at the head and front of any mischief’.⁷

Four months after the Gaze attack, Yagan was captured when he and two companions were lured into a boat and then overpowered. They were taken in bonds to the Perth guardhouse. One eyewitness said:

I happened to be passing through Perth at the very moment when they were carried bound to the guard-house, amidst a concourse of people who were running from all parts to see them...⁸

Although this would seem to indicate that Yagan had already achieved a kind of infamy, Yagan was saved from execution by an unusual man named Robert Lyon, who said that Yagan should be treated as a prisoner of war rather than a common criminal. As a result the Nyungar men were exiled to rocky Carnac Island, off the coast of Fremantle.

Lyon published a number of articles about his time with Yagan - in fact it was this man who first called Yagan the ‘Wallace of the Age’, after the 13th century Scottish patriot.

From the *Perth Gazette*:

Yagan stands very prominent in height among them, walks very erect and is accompanied by a small black dog... which yet by its watchfulness may render futile every attempt to take his master by surprise.⁹

Unfortunately for Lyon, Yagan and his two companions managed to escape, using the island's only boat (which it was thought they could not operate) while the guards looked on helplessly. J. Morgan, the colonial storekeeper, said of the escapees: ‘I know not which to admire most, their ingenuity or their courage’.¹⁰

Soon the warrior was back on the mainland, ‘chucklingly’¹¹ explaining to various people how he had managed to get away. For some reason the authorities did not attempt to recapture him, and in January 1833 he participated in a spear throwing contest with some visiting King George Sound men, which he won easily.

The ambivalence with which he was regarded by the settlers is illustrated by one story of a prominent settler's wife accompanying Yagan and the visiting Aborigines, as they danced, on a grand piano, after which they 'seated themselves in armchairs with the greatest self-complacency, and drank tea'.¹²

Shortly after this interlude, Yagan was again wanted as an outlaw, for the killing of two brothers. The incident was sparked by two murders of Nyungar men. One of these murders had occurred some days before on the High Road, in the very same spot as Yagan's crime:

A man from Van Diemen's Land, employed by Major Nairn, was escorting a cart to the house of Mr Philipps... He saw unoffending natives on the way, and turning to his companion... said, 'Damn the rascals, I'll show you how we treat them in Van Diemen's Land.' Lifting his gun, he fired and shot one...¹³

Soon after, Yagan's brother, Domjuim, was shot dead while robbing a store. (Domjuim's head ended up decorating the office of a local newspaper editor). Yagan and forty companions then ambushed two brothers, Tom and John Velvick, on the High Road, and speared them to death. Large rewards were offered for the capture of Yagan and the others involved, and despite bad weather, armed posses were formed. On the 17th of May, Yagan's father Midgegooroo was captured and brought into town.

After a swift trial, in which Midgegooroo was identified by one of the Entwhistle boys as being one of those who had murdered his father, the old man was publicly executed by firing squad.

At no time was the white servant who murdered the Nyungar man in the potato field brought to trial, nor was it considered that under Nyungar law, all members of that man's family group (ie. the farm workers in Nyungar eyes) were subject to punishment for his actions.

Now the colony was on a knife edge of tension.

From the *Perth Gazette* comes a report of one incident when a rumour that 200 armed Aborigines had attacked and razed the Preston Point ferry post led to an angry, well-armed mob of settlers marching out from Fremantle for revenge. When they arrived, the ferry operator knew nothing about any attack. A few black families were fishing peacefully nearby. It seemed that the rumour had begun when someone had spotted bushfire smoke in the area of the ferry.

Soon after Midgegooroo's death, several armed Aborigines, including Yagan, appeared at George Moore's farm. In his diary Moore, who was unarmed, described this extraordinary encounter:

The warrior, seeing that he was known... said, 'Fremantle white man shoot Domjuim, Yagan brother: shoot black man *cutyell* (two). Me, Yagan, *gyidyill* (spear) white man *cutyell*.'
Moore: 'But Domjuim *quiple* (steal), white man shoot.'
Yagan: 'Yes, Domjuim *quiple*, white man shoot black man, black man 'pear white man'.¹⁴

And so it went on. As Moore says, it was a long argument and 'Yagan was as successful in it as I was.' Eventually Yagan seems to have become frustrated with trying to communicate in English.

Yagan stepped forward, and leaning his left hand on my shoulder, while he gesticulated with the right, delivered a sort of recitative, looking earnestly at my face. I regret that I could not understand it; I thought from the tone and manner that the purport was this: 'You came to our country; you have driven us from our haunts and disturbed us in our occupations. As we walk in our own country we are fired upon by the white men. Why should the white men treat us so?'¹⁵

Although Moore clearly felt compassionate about Yagan's position, he avoided the warrior's questions about what had happened to Midgegooroo. Yagan then explained coldly and clearly that he would take three white lives for that of his father if it was true that Midgegooroo was dead. In answer to Moore's warnings of white reprisals for such an action, the warrior 'scowled a look of daring defiance, and turned on his heel with an air of ineffable disdain'.¹⁶

Yagan did not have time to make good his promise. On Thursday 11 July two shepherds, William Keats, aged 18, and his thirteen year-old brother, James, were working at a homestead on the Upper Swan when a group of Aborigines approached for flour.

Yagan was recognised by the boys, who knew him quite well, but they told him he would be safe with them. William waited for his opportunity. Unobtrusively, he angled his gun towards Yagan. While the warrior was looking the other way, the boy fired. Yagan fell down dead. In the ensuing chaos, the younger boy discharged his gun, wounding another Nyungar man called Heegan. William was speared a number of times. James Keats managed to escape.

When the armed posse was raised, they found Heegan, who was still alive, and 'a man put a gun to his head and blew it to pieces'.¹⁷ Coming upon the body of Yagan, one settler cut off the warrior's head with a knife, before skinning him to preserve the tribal markings on his back.

The actions of the Keats brothers were not universally praised. The editor of the *Perth Gazette* said 'we are not vindicating the outlaw, but we maintain it is revolting to our feelings to hear this lauded as a meritorious deed'.¹⁸

Yagan's head was preserved and later exhibited in English sideshows.

Although the most famous resistance leader of the Swan was dead, the resistance of the south-west was not over. Leaders like Weeip and Calyute would continue the fight.

NOTES

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4. Jack Napoleon of Cape Grim

THE BLACKS. Information has been received in town that numerous depredations have been committed in the Westernport direction by a party of Aborigines... two Van Diemen's Land blacks and three women who are as well skilled in the use of the firearms they possess as the males.

The daring party have extended their depredations to Dandenong and its vicinity, plundering Messrs Mundy's, Westaway's and different other stations and committing unmentionable atrocities... possessing a large quantity of firearms. [*Port Phillip Herald*, 29/10/1841].

For the newly arrived settlers of Melbourne, this news must have seemed like a nightmare; the ghost of the Tasmanian Aboriginal resistance, thought vanquished, returning to haunt the fledgling settlement spreading from the banks of the Yarra. In fact, it was one of those who had helped 'win' the Black War of Van Diemen's Land, George Augustus Robinson, who was responsible for the rebels' presence on the mainland.

So who were these five feared Tasmanians? They came from every corner of the island. Jack Napoleon (Tunnerminnerwait) had been born deep in the north-west, near the site of a horrific massacre, a cliff named Cape Grim. His wife Fanny (Planobeena) had been kidnapped from her people by sealers before being rescued by Robinson. Matilda (Pyterunner), from the west coast, had undergone a similar experience. The other two members of the group were Bob, from the high country near Ben Lomond, and Lalla Rookh (Truganini) of Bruny Island, who would later become known as the 'last of the Tasmanians'. They had been brought to Port Phillip by Aboriginal Protector G.A. Robinson 'for the purpose of aiding in the civilisation of the Aborigines of Australia Felix'.¹

At this stage Jack Napoleon had been with Robinson for ten years. Truganini had been travelling (and some say having a sexual relationship) with Robinson since she was eighteen - twelve years altogether. Along with a number of other 'civilised natives', these two helped Robinson peacefully capture resistance fighters and rebel tribes from all over Tasmania.

In 1835, with practically all the surviving Tasmanians imprisoned on Flinders Island, Robinson turned his attention toward Port Phillip, with a view to using the same methods to Europeanise and isolate the mainland population.

It took some years for the New South Wales authorities (Port Phillip was still a part of the original colony) to agree to Robinson's proposals to bring his Tasmanian assistants across Bass Strait. They were concerned that moving the Flinders Island Aborigines to Port Phillip might expose the settlers 'to acts of violence and rapacity on the part of the Aborigines similar to those by which the Colony of Van Diemen's Land was formerly devastated...'² However Robinson's pleas eventually won out, and in 1838 he was permitted by Sir George Gipps to bring to Port Phillip a 'small number of the Flinders Island blacks as his personal attendants'.³

Robinson, Jack, Truganini and the others arrived to find the Aboriginal population in crisis. Even before the first white settlers sailed into what would become Victoria, epidemics of disease had swept down the east coast from Sydney, decimating tribes. It has been estimated that over eighty percent of the population of Victoria perished between 1788 and the time of John Batman's arrival at Port Phillip Bay.

Writing six years after Melbourne was founded, Robinson describes a people among whom 'disease, destitution and wretchedness prevailed to an alarming extent.' Others mention 'truly appalling' scenes in the Yarra camps, with large numbers dying of dysentery, venereal disease and influenza. Further stresses were created by inter-tribal fights over rapidly dwindling traditional lands.

Naturally these tragedies were in the interests of the land-hungry squatters, who Robinson describes as resorting to 'lynch law' to remove those tribal groups with the strength of numbers to resist at all.

This was a place where the prospects of future wealth, particularly from wool, were so great that people were buying and selling almost everything on credit alone. Early settler Niel Black describes how the new chum went about getting ahead:

The best way is to go outside and take up a new run, provided that the conscience is sufficiently seared to enable him without remorse to slaughter natives right and left. It is universally and distinctly understood that the chances are very small of a person taking up a new run being able to maintain possession without having recourse to such means... killing the Aborigines seems to be little thought of here...⁴

After catching and recovering from influenza himself, Robinson staged a great feast for the Yarra Aborigines, complete with games and fireworks. Shortly before, the first encounter between the Port Phillip Aborigines and the Tasmanians had taken place. It was recorded by Robinson in a letter:

As it was intended to employ the Van Diemen's Land natives as mediators and instructors to these people, I took an early opportunity of introducing them to each other. Their reception was of the utmost friendly character, and has continued so to the present moment.⁵

Meanwhile a group of Assistant Protectors had been appointed. Inexperienced, underfunded, and widely hated by the settlers, these men documented numerous murders and cases of ill-treatment of the black population. Hampered by legal and physical restrictions, the Protectors were helpless to do anything about these injustices, even when they could find white witnesses.

Back in Melbourne, Robinson was spending most of his time battling the bureaucracy over basics like rations for the Aborigines under his protection.⁶ Consequently the Tasmanians spent more and more time with the Port Phillip natives.

In order to free up his budget, Robinson allowed some of the Tasmanians to work on white properties. Others went even further afield, accompanying whites on treks to South Australia.

Unknown to Robinson, his once loyal blacks were now laying plans to turn against the Port Phillip settlers. The first warning came in May 1840, when one Assistant Protector received a report

that a Van Diemen's Land Black from Flinders Island has been traversing over this district. He met with a good reception from the settlers having, as he stated, come to tell them that the five [illegible] Blackfellows were coming down - and bade them get plenty of guns ready.⁷

In August 1840, beset with funding problems, the original purpose of his mission apparently forgotten, Robinson told the authorities that the Tasmanians he had brought with him 'were of no use to me and I wished to get rid of them'.⁸ Soon after, Robinson was formally relieved of responsibility for the Van Diemen's Land natives.

By now however, Jack Napoleon and four of the other Tasmanians had taken matters into their own hands. Two months of terror for the eastern Port Phillip settlers were about to begin.

William Thomas, the son of an Assistant Protector, later recalled the rebels' motives:

At length they tired of the monotony [of] not being allowed to go about at their will. There was a man among them, a man superior in every respect to the others. He had been a leading man, a chief in his own country, and he was the leader of the malcontents here - his name was Napoleon. He talked about what they had suffered at the hands of the white man, how many of their tribe had been slain, how they had been hunted down in Tasmania - now was the time for revenge, they were not cooped up in an Island, they had unlimited bush to roam over at their will - a woman Lalla Rookh [Truganini] aided him and abetted him.⁹

Their first action, according to police reports, was to rob a Dandenong settler of his rifle. Next they laid siege to a station building. When the occupants escaped by removing a plank from one wall 'the villains... crept down the chimney and stole 150 pounds of flour and a bag of sugar'.¹⁰

These two incidents set the pattern for future attacks: a minimum of violence, with firearms and supplies being stolen. Often station buildings would then be burnt down, to complete what began to look like a settler disarmament and eviction campaign. In October the situation changed, with the murder of two whalers near Cape Patterson.

The victims, Yankee and Cook, were shot and clubbed to death after being ambushed. One witness identified the Van Diemen's Land Aborigines, two men and three women, as those responsible. Later the Tasmanians would claim that they had mistaken the whalers for two other men who had been hunting them that day.

At about the same time as this incident, two other attacks came to the attention of the authorities in Melbourne. A hut belonging to the overseer of a remote coal mine had been raided while the men were away. The Aborigines moved the women staying in the hut to safety, 'then rifled the hut of its contents and set it on fire, taking with them two guns and ammunition'.¹¹ Further north, at Westernport, the party had attacked and robbed a station belonging to a man called Jamieson.

When it became clear that all these attacks were by the same group, moving as far as thirty miles per day, it was decided to send troops after the rebels. The Divisional Commander of the Mounted Police put two men, Lieutenant Samuel Rawson of the 28th Regiment, and the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Mr Powlett, in charge of the pursuit.

Accompanied by two policemen, Rawson and Powlett set off in a small sailing boat to reach a station belonging to a Mr Mundy. As there was no wind, they had to row. Night found them trapped by the tide on a reedy flat, with nothing to sustain them but brandy and tobacco. Next

day they made it to Mundy's station. From there they travelled to Anderson's station, following reports that the rebels had robbed settlements nearby.

Two days later the party had swelled to fourteen armed men, but still they found no trace of the Tasmanians. All Rawson and Powlett had to show for their searching efforts was an old gun and a discarded stomach pump! It was decided that Aboriginal trackers were required.

On their way back to Melbourne, the party came across a man called Westerway camped on the edge of Westernport Bay. Shortly before their arrival, the Tasmanians had been here also, somehow stealing the contents of Westerway's tent while he and his men worked nearby. That night, after the police party left, Westerway and his men came under fire from the Tasmanians. They bolted for the safety of the darkness. Jack and the others did not give chase, but stole clothing, money and firearms.

After getting trapped on the mud flats again, Rawson and Powlett made it home to Melbourne five days later.

Having spoken to the newspapers and put the station-owners 'in a great state of alarm', the two men left once more, accompanied by six mounted policemen, six black trackers, and a cart full of supplies.

Coincidentally, Jack Napoleon and the Tasmanian rebels were nearby. On the very day the search recommenced, they stole a large quantity of ammunition from a Dandenong settler.

Although the trackers picked up the tracks of the Tasmanians briefly, they soon lost them again. After a series of false alarms over the next few days, the troopers still had nothing to show. Even more people were recruited for the hunt. By the end of October the party numbered eighteen mounted men and six on foot. As the trackers drew closer to their prey, they showed 'evident signs of fear... advancing with their guns full-cock...'¹²

Soon after, the party actually saw the Tasmanian rebels for the first time. Rawson described the chase:

We had a beautiful race, every horseman off as hard as he could go. But the villains took a swamp which the horses could not cross...¹³

The pursuers had now left their food cart behind, and had to eat what they could find, including damper abandoned by their quarry. Powlett's report to La Trobe was optimistic: 'I do not think much resistance will be made as they must have had several opportunities of firing upon us yesterday'.¹⁴ Soon after this however, the posse again had to return to Melbourne to get more support.

By now, all the squatters around Melbourne and Westernport had either returned to the safety of the town or were preparing for war. Settler Henry Meyrick, who lived ten miles from the site of one attack, wrote home to say that 'the whole neighbourhood has been thrown into the utmost confusion' by the Tasmanians, and boasts of having 'guns loaded enough to have annihilated a whole tribe'.¹⁵

Now there were 29 armed, mounted men in pursuit of five Aborigines on foot in alien country. Once again, their tracks were found and then lost. After another robbery by the rebels, in which the Tasmanians shot and wounded a man, the pursuers finally got on to the right track.

Before dawn, on the morning of 20 November, the party advanced across a lagoon and then up a sandhill. Below them were the sleeping Tasmanians, campfire still smoking.

From Rawson's journal:

We advanced down the hill, and were closing in on them... a policeman who was on my left, catching a glimpse of a man's head, without orders, fired and missed him... Immediately out rushed men and dogs... I fired both barrels... from the heavy fire opened upon them, I concluded they must all be shot. While I was turning over the blankets with the end of my gun, I discovered a woman. I handed her over to a policeman to put handcuffs on her and a little further I discovered another. After they were secured, I put a pistol to their heads and told [them] to call their companions out of the scrub if they were alive.¹⁶

Incredibly, no one had been killed, and only one woman injured. All five Tasmanians were captured. The *Port Phillip Herald* published a sanitised version of the near-massacre: 'They [the troopers] fired a shot over their heads. [The blacks] all rushed into the scrub but were still surrounded and several shots were fired at Jack'.¹⁷

After grounding their boat on the mud flats yet again, Powlett and Rawson finally delivered their prisoners to Melbourne, in chains and under a military escort, on 26 November 1841.

Despite a spirited defence by counsel Redmond Barry (who would sentence Ned Kelly to death years later), the jury took just half an hour to come to a decision regarding the guilt of the Tasmanians. Jack Napoleon and Bob were found guilty of murdering the whalers.

Despite evidence that Truganini had helped club one of the men to death, all three women were acquitted, and later returned to Flinders Island. Judge John Willis sentenced Jack and Bob to be hanged.

On the day of execution, a large crowd gathered about the gallows, giving vent to 'explosions of uproarious merriment'. When the trapdoor opened, the drop was not long enough to kill the men outright. 'The two... twisted and writhed convulsively in a manner that horrified even the most hardened'.¹⁸ After the men died, they hung for an hour.

Their Protector, G.A. Robinson, did not attend the execution. He waited at the Aboriginal graveyard (now the Victoria Market) for the bodies of the men he had named Bob and Jack Napoleon to arrive.

NOTES

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7. W. Thomas, *Report*, May 1840
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16. Rawson, *op cit*, p.39
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5. Dundalli of the Ningy-Ningy

History tells of no people or tribe, however small or weak, submitting tamely to the insolent intrusion of strangers, nor is the Savage of Australia, however despicable some may deem him, so utterly devoid of courage as to yield without a struggle that country which he claims as his own... and to which he is undoubtedly attached. [W.H. Wiseman, 28/8/1855].

Perhaps more than in any state, the 'undesirable' history of Queensland has been swept under the carpet. Aboriginal and convict sites have disappeared. Written records are incomplete. Much of the old architecture is gone. In the rush forward, Queensland has forgotten its past. Dundalli of the Ningy-Ningy people, who fought the invaders around Brisbane for ten years, provides a classic example.

In 1824 a military post and prison was established on the shores of Moreton Bay. Known at the time as Humpybong, this place of crime and punishment was the foundation of what would become the holiday state - Queensland.

The third Commandant, Patrick Logan, soon became legendary for his cruelty to convicts and the men under his command. His demise was recorded in a folk song, *Moreton Bay*:

Like the Egyptians and ancient Hebrews we were oppressed under Logan's yoke,
Till a native black lying there in ambush did give our tyrant his mortal stroke.¹

By the 1840s the convict era was coming to an end, and the people of Moreton Bay and Brisbane were concentrating on building grand public structures and creating industries to dignify and support their far-flung settlement. Explorers investigated upriver and began to penetrate the dry inland and the tropical north. Cattle and sheep numbers grew as land was cleared.

For the clans, tribes and nations who had lived in these areas for thousands of years, the fight was on. The days of trust were over. Whites soon found their reputation had travelled ahead of them.

In 1843 Ludwig Leichhardt wrote of the locals:

As a rule they're treacherous and you have to be cautious... Just before I reached Wide Bay [Maryborough] they had murdered five shepherds there.²

In 1845 the young Dundalli emerged as a guerilla leader for the first time, bringing together the people of Wide Bay and Moreton Bay in an alliance to fight the spreading settlement.³ He is said to have been responsible for attacking a station near Brisbane, and then leading an action that temporarily cut the main dray road connecting the town with the outside world, causing a military post to be established on the road at Helidon (near modern Toowoomba).⁴

Although Dundalli ranged widely, he was originally from Bribie Island, near the Glasshouse Mountains.⁵ His name came from the Bribie word for wonga pigeon.

Dundalli had several guerilla associates, each with various aliases. Make-i-light and Billy Barlow are commonly mentioned. The charismatic leader was famous for travelling at night, an activity unknown among his people.⁶

One difference between Dundalli and guerilla leaders in other parts of Australia - perhaps the reason why he lasted so long - is that he took precautions against being recognised, attacking in areas where he thought he was not known and hitting from behind. He was often suspected, but not firmly linked to an attack until late in 1847.

One of the sawyers named James Smith, on being sworn, gave the following evidence... about eleven o'clock he was sawing in the pit with Boller, when suddenly he found 'the saw come back to him,' and on looking up, observed his mate making signs and calling to the natives, who immediately threw a shower of spears, one of which hit him on the shoulder. He then jumped off the log, and retreated to the hut... with five spears sticking in his body. The blacks then rushed up to the pit, and threw spears at Smith... As he was striving to make his way out, a native, named Dundally, hit him on the back of the head with a waddie, and knocked him senseless into the pit. On recovering himself... Dundally threw another waddie, which struck him on the cheek...⁷

This attack, in which the sawyers Waller and Boller were killed at Pine Creek, north of Brisbane, was a turning point in Dundalli's career. It led to the capture of a man sometimes described as his lieutenant, Make-i-light, and focused strong public pressure on the police to catch Dundalli himself.

Over the next three years, many editorials appear in Brisbane newspapers regarding Aboriginal 'depredations' and 'black marauders'. Letters to the editor complain of sheep being driven from farms and drunken blacks lying in the streets. The choices for Aborigines were becoming stark. In 1849 Frederick Walker, the local Native Police Commandant, wrote:

From the 18th May to the 14th June, the Native Troopers were employed entirely checking the aggressions of the aboriginal natives...⁸

Still Dundalli was not caught. By 1852 his activities were threatening Brisbane itself, and there were calls to strengthen the Native Police, already famous in Queensland for their brutal methods.

The reports which, at brief intervals of time, continue to reach us concerning the depredations of the native blacks, induce us to urge upon the Executive the propriety of losing no time in forming the additional detachments of Native Police... The temerity of the natives is sufficiently displayed by their lawless conduct in the immediate vicinity of Brisbane...⁹

Others saw the Queensland rebels in a more sympathetic light.

We cannot blame them, when, after we have usurped their lands, and driven kangaroo away... they strive to turn us out by the only means in their power, physical force, administered in the only style of warfare with which they are acquainted.¹⁰

In mid-1852 the 'outrages' of the blacks went up another pitch. Newspapers report numbers as high as 200 attacking stations and stockholders near Brisbane. A well-armed Assistant Surveyor named Warner was chased from his tent and robbed of ammunition and supplies. Cattle belonging to farmers near Brisbane were killed and partly eaten. Police on horseback pursuing

those responsible were stopped on various occasions by 'ground in such a soft and rotten state that riding was almost impossible'.

When Dundalli heard that a naturalist, Frederick Strange, was 'anxious to seize him', the warrior sent Strange a personal challenge to fight. Not surprisingly, the offer was declined.¹¹

Meanwhile, official policy regarding Aborigines visiting stations changed, to forbid 'the blacks to approach, because when they are in the habit of coming about the station the occupants may be thrown off their guard, and fall victim to the treachery of the blacks...'

Less than a week after that warning was published, a shepherd was murdered on his run fifteen miles from Brisbane. Billy Barlow and Make-i-light were implicated by survivors. According to the 'accounts of his countrymen... the notorious Dundalli... also figured in the late attacks'.¹²

Meanwhile, in response to a series of stinging personal verbal attacks alleging lack of action and incompetence, Native Police Commandant Walker wrote a long letter to the *Courier*, in which he said:

So long as settlers carry on the system of preventing the blacks from obtaining their lawful means of livelihood... will a system of depredations be carried on, which the Native Police may check, but cannot permanently put an end to.¹³

Soon after there were allegations that 'white scoundrels' were 'acting as spies for the aboriginal natives charged with murders and other crimes'. In December there were reports of Native Police defecting to hostile tribes. Billy Barlow was caught, but then released in March 1853 when his identity could not be confirmed by witnesses.

The ambivalent attitude of the settlers towards the blacks is illustrated by one report from a regular anonymous Burnett District correspondent, usually full of news of the latest atrocities:

We are all anxiously looking for the return of the natives from the Bunya-Bunya [festival]. Our town seems quite desolate without them, and we must confess that they are our only wood and water carriers.¹⁴

The papers tell of more attacks on outer Brisbane over the following months.

In September a station on the Pine River belonging to Mr Cash, apparently a popular target, was robbed by warriors. It is not clear whether Dundalli was among the attackers. Having poured water down the barrels of the mens' guns, the group stole provisions and bedding. If Dundalli was involved, this was to be one of his last actions as an outlaw.

There is some confusion over the circumstances of the guerilla's capture. Some say he wanted to play a game with the whites and painted himself up so that he looked like he belonged to another tribe before walking boldly into Brisbane. Another story is that he was attempting to rescue one of his men in a solo raid when he was caught.

Early Brisbane settler Tom Petrie says that Dundalli had left the bush life and gained work with a brickmaker named Massie. He was then recognised and captured via a Brisbane blacktracker

named Wumbungur.¹⁵ In Petrie's version, the police secured the warrior with 'a great deal of trouble', in the present Wickham Street.¹⁶

Dundalli was charged with four murders for which witnesses could be gathered, and one count of robbery with violence.

Pursuant to remand, the notorious aboriginal Dundalli was brought before the Brisbane Bench again yesterday, to answer for some of the numerous outrages wherewith he stands charged. An interpreter was in attendance, but the scoundrel plainly understood everything that was said.¹⁷

All the prisoner had to say in his defence was that it was 'another blackfellow'. While he was awaiting trial before the Circuit Court, Dundalli gave his gaolers some problems.

DUNDALLI THE MURDERER - This incorrigible ruffian is nearly as troublesome in gaol as he was at liberty. Although ironed on the legs, his behaviour is most violent... The Governor General should issue a Special Commission to try this prisoner forthwith, and the colony could scarcely begrudge the expense.¹⁸

In a more ominous development for Brisbane's administrators: 'large bodies' of Ningy-Ningy men began gathering in Brisbane, intending 'revenge upon the Brisbane blacks who delivered up their great man Dundalli, who now waits in Brisbane gaol...' There were also reports of even bigger parties, led by Billy Barlow, on their way from Pine River, and suggestions that the Native Police should return to Brisbane from the frontier to defend the town's residents.

In October there were still 'Bribie Island blacks... prowling about Brisbane and its neighbourhood avowedly from a feeling of sympathy with double-dyed murderer DUNDALLI...' However the feared outbreak did not come, and on Tuesday 21 November Dundalli was indicted for the murder of William Boller, in 1847.

Several witnesses were called, all for the prosecution. Dundalli's defence counsel, Mr Faucett, commented on the 'mockery of the protection said to be thrown around the blacks by the British Government'. Despite an 'eloquent and powerful appeal to the jury on behalf of the prisoner' by Mr Faucett, the jury returned a verdict of guilty. Later that day Dundalli was again indicted and found guilty, this time for the murder of Andrew Gregor, at the Caboolture River, back in 1846.

Dundalli was sentenced to hang.

On Friday 5 January a large crowd gathered at the gallows, built on the site of the current Post Office.¹⁹ Correspondents mention large numbers of women and children being present. Windmill Hill, opposite, 'was simply lined with blacks', according to one eyewitness, including Bribie and Brisbane natives. Dundalli did not go quietly.

When the executioner went into his room to pinion him, he cried and wailed piteously, appealing to all near for their help to save him. As, owing to the desperate character of this criminal, some resistance was expected, more than the usual precautions were taken to prevent an escape... he went up the ladder without the aid of force, continuing, however, to call upon the names of those who knew him, and crying out loudly in his own tongue when on the scaffold, to some blacks who were witnessing the execution from the ridge.²⁰

Tom Petrie, who understood Dundalli's tongue, was in the crowd, and claims the warrior was exhorting the people on the hill to kill Wumbungur, and avenge his own death.²¹

When the bolt was drawn it was still not over.

...the murderer fell, but in consequence of some wretched bungling on the part of Green, the hangman, the feet of Dundalli fell firmly on the top of his coffin, beneath the gallows. A turnkey quickly drew away the coffin, but still the feet of the hanging man touched the ground, and the spectators were shocked by the sight of Green lifting up the legs of the malefactor, and tying them backwards towards his pinioned arms... Thus died one of the guiltiest and most incorrigible of the aboriginal natives of this quarter.²²

The expected reprisals for Dundalli's death did not eventuate, and the lack of a successor suggests that he had masterminded even more attacks than had been thought. Some time later, Dundalli's brother, Ommuli, was accidentally hanged while he was being brought into custody.²³

NOTES

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6. The Kalkadoons

Most Australians grow up knowing the story of Gallipoli; few are told the story of the Kalkadoons' heroic stand at Battle Mountain - one of the few recorded pitched battles between Aborigines and whites. [*Land Rights News*, March 1988].

A little over one hundred years ago, a war was fought in the desolate country between Mount Isa and Cloncurry, in north-west Queensland. It lasted six years. Between 500 and 900 people were killed. The war culminated in the battle of Battle Mountain, which saw the only old-style European cavalry charge in Australia's history. In spite of this, few Australians travelling along the modern highway through this area have ever heard of the Kalkadoons, the last warriors of the Queensland resistance.

Physically, the Kalkadoons (or more accurately Kalkatungu) were extraordinary looking people, particularly when prepared for battle.

A Kalkadoon fighting man in full dress was a fearsome sight. Generally more than six feet tall and broad in proportion, his height was added to by piled-up hair and a plume of emu or eaglehawk feathers. His face was either covered with or surrounded by a band of white feathers stuck on with dried blood. Bands of feathers decorated his arms and legs. He had a collection of spears ranging from a twelve-foot giant which he used as a lance, to light throwing spears, tipped with fire-hardened wood and barbs... These, when thrown with a woomera, could go through a man at seventy yards.¹

Burke and Wills, the ill-fated explorers, were the first whites to enter Kalkadoon country, when they crossed the Cloncurry River with their camels in 1861. In his diary William Wills reports seeing columns of smoke to the east and west. These were probably signal fires. Presumably because it was obvious the invaders were travelling through, the Kalkadoons did not engage the party. (Years later, they were astonished to hear that the party had starved to death in what was to them a country rich in food).

In 1864 a man called Edward Palmer established a cattle station on the edge of Kalkadoon territory. Palmer appears to have had a great deal of respect for the local people; he attempted to learn their language and admired their strict marriage and trespass laws. Palmer later wrote that

the white race were the aggressors, as they were the invaders of the black's hunting territory... Whenever new districts were settled, the blacks had to move on to make room. The result was war between the races.²

The establishment of Burketown on the Gulf of Carpentaria in 1865 laid the foundation for war in the Kalkadoon country, with large numbers of settlers flooding south and threatening limited water and food supplies. Men like Palmer, and later Ernest Henry, who managed to work with the Kalkadoons in a copper-mining venture based on fair trade, were rare. The prevailing attitude might best be summed up by a letter from 'Never Never' to the editor of *The Queenslander*:

He [the native of Australia] never seeks to improve land for those who will come after him. This justifies our presence here; this is the only plea we have in justification of it and having once admitted it we must go the whole length, and say that the sooner we clear the weak useless race away the better.³

By the mid-1870s the Kalkadoons' patience had been stretched to the limit, and weapons were carried by whites at all times in case of attack.

1877 saw the arrival of a man who would make it his mission in life to destroy the Kalkadoon Nation - Alexander Kennedy, from the Scottish county of Perthshire.

After attempts to establish himself in the sheep and sugar industries in eastern Queensland failed, Kennedy bought a property on Sulieman Creek, on the southern border of Kalkadoon country, and named it Buckingham Downs. Next he took up Noarnside and Calton Hills, deep in the Kalkadoon heartland. The traditional owners, who Kennedy compared to 'scorpions', were not consulted.⁴ Sacred sites and water supplies were violated. Cattle replaced traditional food sources, and could be taken by hunters only at the risk of being killed themselves.

At first, Kalkadoon resistance consisted mainly of drays being ambushed and stock harassment:

Much trouble was experienced with the blacks, who came down from their rocky retreats and speared the cattle... Often the partners would see cattle with broken-off spear shafts sticking out of them, and on other occasions the scene of a feast where the tribe had made a kill... the herd became so wild, through continually being hunted, that it was difficult to manage and would stampede at the sight of a blackfellow...⁵

When European incursions into Kalkadoon country continued unabated, the response changed. In December 1878 three stockmen led by a man called Molvo were attacked and killed at Wonomo Waterhole. Their cattle were all either killed or dispersed. It appears the permanent waterhole may have been a sacred site.

Soon after, warriors attacked white outposts at Stanbrook Station and Sulieman Creek, using what would become a classic Kalkadoon battle technique: striking everywhere at once. At Stanbrook the war party was driven off by a show of arms. Unfortunately for the Kalkadoons, the warriors were anticipated by the police at Kennedy's Sulieman Creek homestead. A large force of troopers arrived from Boulia before the Kalkadoons could launch a frontal assault on the homestead, and as many as 300 warriors are said to have been killed in this one encounter.⁶

Alexander Kennedy himself had been absent at the time of the attack. On his return he set out after the retreating Kalkadoon survivors, expressing a particular wish to 'get the piebald black... a cheeky trouble-making chap'.⁷ Later that day Kennedy and the armed police caught up with some of the warriors in hilly country, and another one-sided massacre ensued. Amongst the dead was a warrior with pink patches on his skin who had argued with Kennedy about the rights of his people.

Despite enormous losses at Sulieman Creek, the Kalkadoon Nation were far from beaten. They had learned the power of massed firearms, and would use their knowledge of the land and guerilla warfare skills from now on to win a series of decisive victories over the whites.

Meanwhile Kennedy, their nemesis, remained. This was a man who believed that 'the only way to survive in this wild country was to show conclusively who was master'.⁸ He took pride in being 'uncompromising in his dealing with the Kalkadoons', and was always at the head of any reprisal party.

During this period Kennedy befriended the miner Ernest Henry. The Kalkadoons, until now Henry's friends, became convinced that he had turned against them. One young Kalkadoon man removed the miner's firearms and challenged him to a one on one spear duel. Both men were wounded before honour was satisfied.

One of the reasons Alexander Kennedy survived the numerous attempts on his life was his young Kalkadoon 'servant' Sandy, whom he had fostered since childhood. One night Kennedy sent Sandy to spy on a Kalkadoon gathering. That night a new song was being performed.

Sandy translated the words for his master:

We kill Kennedy in the morning,
 We of the Kalkadoon tribe; have our glory and prowess departed?
 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!
 Do not our women deride us?
 We are many and can conquer the white man's magic.
 We kill Kennedy in the morning!⁹

Warned in time, Kennedy rode back to the ceremony and fired into the assembled group at random, scattering the people.

Soon after, Kennedy went to Brisbane in an effort to get government support to fight the Kalkadoons. Although he was not officially backed, the Commissioner in charge of the police and other paramilitary forces informally gave Kennedy his full support.

Early in 1883 the officer-in-charge of the Cloncurry Native Police force, Marcus de la Poer Beresford, was tracking down the Kalkadoon killers of a man called Britcher. On the night of 24 January, he himself was attacked, together with four troopers, as they camped in the McKinlay Ranges. The well-armed police soon had the upper hand, and took a number of Kalkadoons prisoner. Beresford corralled them in a gorge for the night and put them under guard. By morning Beresford and three of the troopers were dead.

Beresford had underestimated the Kalkadoons. It was later worked out that they had left a cache of weapons in the gorge, and simply waited for the opportunity to use them. The surviving trooper walked twenty miles with a spear imbedded in his flesh to raise the alarm. This was a moment of glory for the Kalkadoons. Punitive expeditions were unsuccessful, and for long months the people of Cloncurry lived in constant fear of attack. Settlers moved about only in strongly armed groups. The horses of the Native Police were driven off and many were speared. For more than a year, the gorges and hills were Kalkadoon country again.

It was not destined to last. Late in 1883 a new Sub-Inspector of Native Police in Cloncurry was appointed; twenty-five year old Frederick Charles Urquhart. His first action was to round up the scattered horses and buy or commandeer more. Then he drilled the Native Police troopers 'with

all the vehemence of a Prussian Sergeant-Major',¹⁰ moving their camp twenty-five miles out of town to maintain discipline.

The Kalkadoons did not take long to contact their new enemy, sending a message challenging 'him to come out into the hills, and that they would finish him off like Beresford'.¹¹ This challenge was issued by a man called Mahoni, the only possible Kalkadoon leader whose name has been recorded.¹²

In mid-1884 the co-owner (with Alexander Kennedy) of Calton Hills Station, James Powell, was speared to death while mustering cattle. When Kennedy heard the news he rode eighty kilometres to meet Urquhart and the troopers. Having buried Powell, they joined forces and trapped the war party in a gorge. Although the Kalkadoons fought hard, they could not match the carbines. One eyewitness said that 'men, women and children were killed, but mainly men'.¹³

Sub-Inspector Urquhart justified these actions, and those to come, in verse:

Grimly the troopers stood around
That new-made forest grave,
And to their eyes that fresh heap mound
For vengeance seemed to crave.
And one spoke out in deep stern tones,
And raised his hand on high
For every one of these poor bones,
A Kalkadoon shall die.¹⁴

Considering the 500 bones in the human body, Urquhart may not have been too far off the mark. Over the next months private posses of armed squatters, together with Urquhart's revamped Native Police, took a terrible toll on the local Aborigines. It has been said that 'the murder of Powell marked the point at which it was officially decided to break the strength of the Kalkadoons'.¹⁵

The event which led to the final battle of the Kalkadoons was the September murder of a Chinese shepherd in the foothills of the Argylla Mountains, on the Granada Station. Worried about his stock, the station's owner, Hopkins, gathered a large body of men to augment Urquhart's Native Police. Pastoralists and farmhands came from all over the surrounding area to take part in the punitive expedition. In military terms, the total body of men amounted to company strength. Observing this large body of whites gathering, messages quickly went through the Kalkadoon network for the warriors to assemble.

Urquhart tracked the Kalkadoons, now 600 strong, to a spot atop a boulder-studded hill, sixty miles north of Cloncurry. Now known as Battle Mountain, the site had been well chosen. As well as the excellent tactical advantage presented by the location, overlooking the plain below, the Kalkadoons had laid in large stocks of spears and boomerangs for just such a siege.

Sub-Inspector Urquhart started the battle by following regulation Native Police procedure, ordering the assembled warriors to 'Stand in the Queen's name'. The Kalkadoons replied with a hail of rocks and missiles and a 'roar of defiance'.¹⁶ Urquhart then ordered the famous cavalry charge, hoping to terrify the defenders from their strong position. 200 men and horses thundered

up the lower slopes of the hill. Bullets from their weapons bounced harmlessly off the rocks. After thirty metres the hill became too steep for the horses, and the men were forced to dismount and run for cover as spears rained down.

High above, the warriors yelled in derision, led by a man wearing a headdress of white down, and a 'thick possum-string hanging around his neck, which was attached to another string passing around his waist'.¹⁷

The attack was a shambles. As Urquhart battled to regain control over his men, he himself was hit in the face with a heavy lump of rock-hard anthill, thrown by a 'huge'¹⁸ warrior. As Urquhart lay unconscious on the ground, one of the Native Police shot down his attacker.

A wall of covering fire allowed the troopers to rescue their commander while other dead and dying men were temporarily abandoned on the mountainside. Leaderless, the white army could offer little fight. The merest movement from cover brought down an avalanche of missiles. It must have seemed to the Kalkadoons that the battle was won.

Some hours later however, Urquhart recovered consciousness. Immediately he took command. A flanking movement was attempted, in which the Kalkadoons were forced from cover to defend assaults on two sides. Suddenly, without warning, the Kalkadoon warriors formed ranks and came charging down the hill towards their assailants, spears raised like lances.

For one extraordinary moment the formation held - then the warriors were cut down by round after round from the carbines of the whites. The Kalkadoons wavered, then reformed and charged once more. Again they were mown down. Bravery and stone age weapons were no match for the explosive firepower of the whites.

At last the guns fell silent. The resistance of the Kalkadoons had ended. 200 of the finest Kalkadoon warriors lay dead on the slopes of Battle Mountain. In 1960 it was noted that 'for decades, a hill was littered with the bleached bones of warriors, gins and piccaninnies'.¹⁹

Not content with the slaughter, Urquhart and his troopers continued their 'cleaning up' operations for several days.²⁰

Following the battle, Frederick Urquhart went on to become Commissioner of Police for Queensland and then Administrator of the Northern Territory. The last known Kalkadoon survivor of Battle Mountain, Tubbie Terrier, died in Cloncurry Hospital in 1930.²¹

NOTES

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7. Jandamurra of the Bunuba

I ask whether the life of one European is not worth one thousand natives as far as the settlement of this country is concerned. [Alexander Forrest, member for West Kimberley, 1893].

The Kimberley area of north-western Western Australia was the last part of Australia to be colonised. Although this was (and is) spectacularly rugged and remote country, geography was not the only reason for the delay. For this was also the homeland of Jandamurra, better known to the Europeans as Pigeon. Feared and respected, Jandamurra led the last great campaign of what some call the Hundred Years War - the defence of the Australian continent.

Long before white explorers entered their lands, Jandamurra's people, the Bunuba, had heard stories from their coast-dwelling neighbours about pearlers abducting Aboriginal people for labour. However it wasn't until 1879 that an expedition through Bunuba territory was mounted. Led by Alexander Forrest, younger brother of WA's future Premier, the expedition braved 'plagues of mosquitoes', water shortages, and almost impassable mountain ranges, before they found what they were looking for near what is now Fitzroy Crossing. From Forrest's journal:

As far as the eye could reach to the south... was one vast level plain of magnificent feeding ground, and at our feet a running stream, which we could trace far out into the distance. These plains... comprise, according to my calculation, not less than 1,000,000 acres, and judging from the richness of their herbage, would carry no less a number of sheep.¹

On the Fitzroy River flats Forrest estimated a further 'four million acres of pastoral lands'.² The course for the future was set.

Three years later most of the lowland area of the West Kimberley had been taken up as sheep stations, and the port of Derby was established on the coast nearby. Although the lowland-dwelling tribes were quickly dispossessed of their land, the Bunuba were not yet directly affected, protected as they were by the Napier and Oscar Ranges.

In 1883, when Jandamurra was ten years old, two new stations were set up at the foot of these mountains; Lennard River and Lillimooloora. Despite some cases of stock killing for food on the part of the Bunuba, both stations needed Aboriginal labour. When Jandamurra's mother and some other members of his family 'came in' to Lennard River Station, the young boy also began working for the owner, William Lukin.

Jandamurra was quickly noticed for his skills. A quick learner, he could soon speak English confidently, with a 'gregarious'³ sense of humour, and appears to have been well-liked by Lukin, who nicknamed him Pigeon. Although small for his age, Jandamurra was fast and strong, and became known as an expert shearer, 'a wonderful horseman and a deadly rifle shot'.⁴ When Jandamurra was fifteen, the Bunuba elders decided that it was time for the boy to undergo initiation. Obediently, Jandamurra left Lukin's station and returned to the mountains.

The process of initiation, as practised by the Bunuba, was long, hard and mentally and physically gruelling. Not only did songs and stories have to be memorised and understood, but the body was put through an endurance test designed to ensure that the man to be was capable of supporting a future family.

Jandamurra did not return to the station after his initiation. Instead he joined the 'stock spears' of his tribe, led by a charismatic man called Ellemarra, who was famous for spearing a white stockman at Lillimooloora Station and single-handedly challenging a police patrol.⁵

Early in 1886 Ellemarra became the first Bunuba to be arrested for stock killing. After serving only two months of his sentence, a dramatic escape served to increase his rebel reputation to legendary status among his people. Police Department records confirm that Ellemarra walked 600 miles home to his native ranges after escaping from Roebourne Prison.

Meanwhile, Jandamurra and other Bunuba men continued harassing the pastoralists, killing sheep and then quickly retreating to the mountains. In 1889 two thousand sheep were killed on Lennard River Station. Another four thousand died at Lillimooloora in that year. Jandamurra's old employer, Lukin, was shocked when he discovered that his former servant was among the stock spears.

By now no less than a quarter of the WA police force were engaged in defending the tiny white population of the Kimberley and their stock. Still the attacks continued, undermining the economic base of the intruders. Warriors such as Jandamurra, with European pastoral training, used their knowledge of stock control to make the killing even more efficient.

Although Jandamurra was much admired among the Bunuba for his hunting skills, Banjo Warramarra, the Bunuba custodian of the Pigeon story, has said that the elders at this time were becoming increasingly unhappy with Jandamurra's social behaviour.⁶ Instead of acting like the other unmarried young men, and staying with members of his own sex, Jandamurra chose to flaunt tradition and mix with young women, who were traditionally reserved for the old men of the tribe. This lack of respect for taboo was a serious crime among the Bunuba. For the moment, Jandamurra evaded punishment. Meanwhile a police warrant was out for his arrest.

Shortly after the establishment of a new police station on the edge of Bunuba country, in late 1889, Jandamurra was captured, along with Ellemarra. According to the journal of the arresting officer, Police Constable Watts, the two were chained and marched into Derby.

Ellemarra was immediately returned to Roebourne to serve out his sentence. To the younger Jandamurra, the police showed more mercy.

Tried in Derby, Pigeon was convicted and served a period in [Derby] gaol, but he was behind bars for only a short period as owing to his superior intelligence he was given the job of attending to the horses of the troopers.⁷

For someone who loved horses as much as Jandamurra, this was hardly punishment at all. He performed his duties with conspicuous diligence, and was soon allowed free movement in the town, becoming a well-known and trusted local identity.

Jandamurra's reputation as a horseman was also confirmed during this period. When a Derby man called Billy O'Donnell boasted that no one but himself could ride his stallion Whiteface, an 'equine outlaw',⁸ Jandamurra could not resist the challenge. One afternoon O'Donnell left his

horse in the police yard while he marked out a road. He returned to find that 'Pigeon had mounted Whiteface bareback and was riding around the yard...'⁹

After a year with the police in Derby, Pigeon returned to work for William Lukin at Lennard River Station. There were now a total of four stations bordering the mountains, and despite the increased police presence, stock spearing was on the rise. The Bunuba had established a network of (mostly female) lookouts on the high cliffs, and even with the assistance of trackers, the capture of stock spearsers by police was becoming a rare occurrence.

Police shooting and imprisoning of Bunuba people hardened the resistance. Some whites argued that the British justice approach be abandoned entirely:

It would be a good time for the WA Government to shut its eyes for, say, three months and let the settlers up here have a little time to teach the nigger the difference between thine and mine... It would only have to be done once and, once done, could be easily forgotten about.¹⁰

Briefly, Jandamurra returned to the mountains. However the Bunuba elders had not forgotten about his earlier behaviour, and to escape tribal punishment he joined the workforce of Joe Blyth, the owner of Brooking Springs Station. As it turned out, Blyth was a violent and ruthless boss. Caught between a rock and a hard place, Jandamurra crept away to the mountains once again.

Before his own elders had a chance to catch up with him, Jandamurra was captured by the police and charged with absconding from bonded service. This time it was arranged that Pigeon serve out his time as a black tracker.

Together with a man from a southern tribe, named Captain, Jandamurra was assigned to the remote Robinson River Police Station, 70 miles north of Derby, under the charge of PC Bill Richardson. These three men, with apparently so little in common, quickly formed a close bond. All three were operating in foreign territory, neither Bunuba nor white controlled. Together they captured many hostile Aborigines, and on at least one occasion Jandamurra saved Richardson's life while under attack.¹¹

After the success of the three man Robinson River unit, the head of the West Kimberley police, Sub-Inspector Drewry, decided to transfer them into Bunuba territory, despite the long-standing policy of never using Aboriginal trackers against their own people.

At first this controversial attempt to stop the Bunuba stock-killers appeared to pay off. On their first patrol, Richardson, Captain and Jandamurra captured sixteen notorious Bunuba outlaws, who were chained by the neck and marched back to the now-abandoned Lillimooloora homestead.

Amongst the group were known stock-spearing ringleaders, ex-police trackers, and escapees from Derby prison. Jandamurra knew all of the men personally and was related to more than a few via blood ties.¹²

That night Constable Richardson heard that Ellemarra, again free and wanted by the police, was nearby. Although the policeman was terribly sick with fever, he sent Captain and Jandamurra off to bring in Ellemarra as well. Richardson had stretched his luck too far.

Although the trackers did catch up with Ellemarra, things did not go to plan. During the night, Ellemarra and the other captured men told Jandamurra he was obliged to release them since they had waived tribal punishment for his previous defiance of Bunuba law. There were also stories of a murderous new policeman at Fitzroy Crossing and an imminent invasion of white cattlemen into the heart of Bunuba country. It was made clear to Jandamurra that he would never be allowed back in his native country if he locked up his own people.¹³

On 31 October the trackers released the prisoners. Jandamurra shot Constable Richardson in the head as he slept.¹⁴ The rebellion had begun.

Despite his youth, Jandamurra quickly showed the initiative that would make him the leader of the Bunuba warriors. His plan was to ambush and destroy the cattlemen about to pass through Windjina Gorge, and use their arms and provisions to support the next stage of the fight. Messages were sent throughout the ranges for support.

As it turned out, the cattlemen Bourke and Gibbs had not heard of Richardson's murder. They were unarmed, easy targets as they negotiated the cattle through the narrow gorge. Bourke was the first to fall.

Gibbs, who was some distance away, saw what happened. As he... tried to gallop away... Pigeon ran along the sandy bed of the pool and just as Gibbs' horse hit the top of the bank, Pigeon fired and Gibbs fell forward on the animal's neck. The mare evidently carried him some hundreds of yards, before she propped and stopped, and Gibbs fell off on his back - dead.¹⁵

The two Queensland Aboriginal stock boys travelling with the men managed to escape to warn the wagon driver, Fred Edgar, who was travelling a few miles behind. Edgar abandoned the dray and rushed back to Derby to tell the police what had happened.

After the first thrill of victory, Jandamurra quickly set about planning the next engagement. As expected, the wagon contained an armoury of firearms and ammunition, more than enough to deal with the small police patrol which would probably follow. Having captured these further police weapons, Jandamurra's idea was to then attack all the stations between the gorge and the coast, eventually amassing enough weapons and manpower to attack Derby itself.

The next step was to train his warriors in the use of European weapons. Jandamurra's experience with the police had taught him that this factor, more than any other, would decide whether the rebellion would succeed or fail.

Later, when rifle ammunition was running short, Jandamurra further demonstrated his ingenuity with European firearms by binding the 'leg sinews of a kangaroo'¹⁶ around .44 cartridges to make them fit the Enfield rifle.

When news of the murders at Lillimooloora Station and Windjina Gorge arrived, Sub-Inspector Drewry immediately mobilised all the police in the district. Fifteen other Europeans were commissioned as special constables.

As the party neared the site of the latest attack, informants warned Drewry that Jandamurra and his warriors were still in Windjina Gorge, intending to destroy the police as they had destroyed Bourke and Gibbs.

The rebel warriors had chosen their positions well, in caves behind enormous boulders. Drewry quickly realised that it would be slaughter if his men walked into the trap.

To break the deadlock, Drewry sent six black Queensland stockmen into the gorge with orders to pretend to join the gang, and then kill Jandamurra and Ellemarra when they had a chance. From the outset the Queenslanders were not believed. Ellemarra wanted to kill them but Jandamurra refused, and allowed the men to leave.

Jandamurra's mercy would cost him. On their return, the Queenslanders provided detailed information about the rebels' position to Drewry.¹⁷

Next morning, at dawn, Drewry's force of thirty men attacked from three directions. By late afternoon casualties on the rebels' side were rising; a number of men had been wounded by splinters of rock thrown up by ricocheting bullets. Jandamurra himself fought bravely until collapsing after three serious wounds.

One by one, the fighters retreated up into the maze of tunnels behind their caves, helped by the ever-supportive women who became such a feature of the rebellion. Jandamurra himself is said to have been hidden by one of these women in a cave nearby until the police had gone.¹⁸ As if by magic, Jandamurra had slipped through their fingers. It would not be the last time.

Although it was thought by the authorities that Jandamurra had probably died of his wounds, reinforcements were sent from the south to support police 'operations' throughout the ranges and along the Fitzroy River. Most of the victims of the resulting massacres were not directly involved with the uprising.

The core of what would have been Jandamurra's army was fragmented and on the run. Captain was captured and sent to Rottnest Island.¹⁹ Ellemarra and Lillimarra were caught and hanged in Derby. But the war was not over. For almost a year Jandamurra laid low in the Cave of the Bats at Tunnel Creek, protected by his mother while he recovered from his wounds.²⁰ This extraordinary place, then unknown to the police, is now a major Kimberley tourist attraction.

Jandamurra's resurrection was well planned for shock value. In November 1895 the 'Terror of the Kimberleys'²¹ stole another gun and some provisions from the Lillimooloora Police Station while two constables slept inside. His tracks were unmistakable.

Jandamurra began playing games with the police, appearing many times and then vanishing just as a patrol were convinced they had him cornered. Early in 1896 one patrol followed Jandamurra to Tunnel Creek and camped at the entrance of the cave. There seemed no possibility of escape.

Soon after came the news that Jandamurra had raided the unattended police station back at the foot of the ranges.

Police records show that it didn't stop there. Late in 1896 Jandamurra was being pursued by a PC Price. From the top of the Napier Range, Jandamurra threw stones and 'ridiculed'²² the policeman, while other Aborigines looked on with laughter.

Jandamurra was back in the news:

Pigeon is said to be a remarkably intelligent native, a wonderful master of woodcraft, and a splendid rifle shot. He has travelled all over the Kimberley district and is well acquainted with the intricate localities among the mountains...²³

The Police Commissioner in Perth, Colonel Phillips, demanded whatever steps necessary be taken 'to rid'²⁴ the district of Pigeon. Soon after, Drewry was replaced by Sub-Inspector Ord, who was also humiliated by the ex-tracker.

Large patrols sent out specifically in search of Jandamurra were openly taunted by their quarry. Ord later wrote that 'it would not matter if the whole British army were sent here, Pigeon would still laugh at them from the top of the range'.²⁵

Jandamurra's next target was to be the Oscar Range Station.

News has just been received here that a man named Thomas Jasper... an employee of Oscar Station... was shot dead last night... The notorious Pigeon is supposed, upon good evidence, to be the perpetrator of the terrible deed, as he is known to be among the natives hereabouts, who are well-armed and in great numbers. It is also believed that Pigeon is trying to incite the natives to either murder all the whites or endeavour to drive the latter out of the country.²⁶

By now Jandamurra had gathered a fighting force of twenty. Using Jasper's weapons, they attacked the homestead. John Collins, the station manager, found himself under siege. Somehow he got a message out to the Fitzroy Crossing Police Station nearby.

Another battle with the police ensued, in which two of Jandamurra's group were killed and others wounded. Outnumbered, Jandamurra and the survivors fled.

Soon there were four separate police parties racing against time to catch the rebels before they disappeared back into the ranges. One patrol, led by Corporal Cadden, captured and chained four of Jandamurra's warriors. Next day, near Tunnel Creek, Jandamurra's tracks, and those of eight women with him, were found by a Pilbara tracker called Micki. After a brief pursuit, Micki managed to shoot and wound Pigeon, who fell and lay motionless.²⁷

Joe Blyth, a member of the patrol, rode up and fired another round into the warrior's body. Simultaneously Jandamurra whirled and fired his own rifle, hitting his old employer in the hand. Although Jandamurra had been hit in the chest, he managed to get away. The trackers followed his blood until dark, when the search was abandoned.

In an apparent attempt to rescue his chained comrades, Jandamurra followed the patrol. Next morning Jandamurra shot and killed Blythe's stockboy, before dispersing the patrol's horses. With the last of his strength, Jandamurra ran circles around the men, firing, giving them the impression of being surrounded.

Unfortunately for Jandamurra, the sound of gunfire drew the attention of another patrol nearby. The situation became hopeless. Abandoning the attempt to free his warriors, Jandamurra fled towards Tunnel Creek.

After a running duel, he was shot dead by the tracker Micki.²⁸ It was April Fools Day, 1897.²⁹

Jandamurra's dream of a grand union of tribes driving the whites from the Kimberley had ended in failure. Like Ned Kelly, it had ultimately been a combination of bad luck, deceit and foolhardy bravery that led to his downfall. Jandamurra's death also marked the end of large-scale, organised violent resistance by Aborigines in Australia.

Over the next century the battle for the land would be fought in different ways.

NOTES

1. Alexander Forrest, *Journal*, 20/7/1879 quoted in J.S. Battye, *The History of the North West of Australia*, Perth: Jones, 1915, p.75
2. *ibid*, p.74
3. H. Pedersen, 'Pigeon: an Australian Aboriginal Rebel', B. Reece & T. Stannage (ed), *European-Aboriginal Relations in Western Australian History*, Nedlands: University of WA Press, 1984, p.8
4. *Western Mail*, 9/1/1947
5. Pedersen, *op cit*, p.9
6. Banjo Warramarru, Bunuba elder and custodian of the Pigeon story, quoted in Pedersen, *op cit*, p.9
7. *Countryman*, 13/9/1956
8. *ibid*
9. *ibid*
10. Derby Correspondent, *North West Times*, 1894 quoted in Stephen Hawke, 'The North West Massacres', *Sydney Morning Herald* 31/5/1988
11. Pedersen, *op cit*, p.10
12. *ibid*, p.11
13. *ibid*
14. A.L. Haydon, *The Trooper Police of Australia*, London: Melrose, 1911, p.319
15. *Countryman*, 13/9/1956
16. *ibid*
17. Police Department Records, *Drewry's Report* quoted in Pedersen, *op cit*, p.12
18. *ibid*
19. *Northern Public Opinion*, 20/5/1897
20. H.H. Wilson, *Cyclone Coasts*, Adelaide: Rigby, 1980, p.138
21. *Countryman*, 13/9/1956

22. Pedersen, *op cit*, p.13
23. *Pilbarra Goldfield News*, 19/3/1897
24. Pedersen, *op cit*, p.13
25. Derby Police Station Records, 653/96 quoted in Pedersen, *op cit*, p.13
26. *Pilbarra Goldfield News*, 19/3/1897
27. Sgt. Cadden, Derby Police Station Records 17/7/1889 quoted in Pedersen, *op cit*, p.14
28. *Northern Public Opinion*, 10/4/1897
29. Wilson, *op cit*, p.139

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