A different mode of war?

Aboriginal ‘guerilla tactics’ in defining the ‘Black War’ of Southern Queensland 1843-1855

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Abstract

Frontier violence is now an accepted chapter of Australian history. Indigenous resistance underlies this story, yet it has barely been examined as a military phenomenon (Connor 2004). Our understanding of military strategies Indigenous groups employed, and their broader objectives in undertaking resistance remains vague, being more often assumed than proven.

Building on Laurie’s and Cilento’s contentions (1959) that an alliance of Aboriginal groups staged a fairly successful ‘Black War’ in southern Queensland during the 1840s and 1850s, the author seeks evidence for a historically definable (1843-1855) conflict during this period, complete with a record of Indigenous declaration, victories, coordination, leadership and planning.

As the Australian situation continues to present elements which have proved difficult to reconcile with existing paradigms for military history, this study applies definitions from guerilla and terrorist conflict (e.g. Eckley 2001, Kilcullen 2009) to explain key features of the southern Queensland “Black War.” It also compares this to similar frontier engagements in other parts of Australia.

The author concludes that Australian “resistance” wars followed their own distinctive pattern – achieving coordinated response through inter-tribal gatherings and sophisticated signaling; relying heavily on economic sabotage and targeted payback killings; and guided by self-deprecating “loner-leaders” much more wily and reticent than their equivalents in other parts of the world. The author also argues that contrary to the claims of military historians such as Dennis (1995), there is ample evidence for tactical innovation. He notes a move away from pitched battles to ambush affrays; the development of full-time ‘guerilla bands’; and use of new materials such as iron and glass.
A. “But was it Warfare?”: Defining and Identifying Resistance Wars in Australia

During the 1950s – well before ‘Bill’ Stanner’s Boyer Lecture (1968) roused innumerable historians into filling up the gaps in Aboriginal history - Arthur Laurie (c.1889-1970) - a trade unionist and amateur historian – penned notes and articles concerning “the Black War of Resistance in Queensland.” This probably makes Laurie, as Peter Sutton alleges, “the first historical writer to espouse the strong version of the resistance model of Aboriginal contact history.”1

Arthur Laurie’s proposal of a “Black War” of resistance, which he viewed as becoming “systematic” over the 1840s-1850s,2 was further developed by Clem Lack and Ralphael Cilento in their definitive Queensland history: *Triumph in the Tropics* (1959). Cilento and Lack stated that this war “flared “ after the bunya festivals of 1841 and 1844, growing in ferocity over twenty years, costing 250 white lives, and seeing settlers driven off Wide Bay and south-western Queensland, until it culminated in the massacres at Hornet Bank and Cullin-la-rigo.3 They even called this a “guerrilla war” on the “fragmentary aboriginal frontiers.”4

At this time, it was extraordinary to apply such terms to Aboriginal tribesmen fighting against the tide of settlement. However, in the decades of scholarship that followed Stanner’s lecture, an avalanche of purported heroes, battles, massacres and even genocide has been added to the developing theme of Aboriginal “wars of resistance.” Now it almost taken for granted.

Despite this, half of *Forgotten War* (2013) - the most recent work of the champion of frontier violence (Henry Reynolds) - concerns two problematic questions: “But was it warfare?” and “What kind of warfare?” The issue, as military historian John Connor has repeatedly highlighted, is that resistance history has rarely been analyzed from a military perspective, despite some remarkable forays by David Broome (1988) and Jeffrey Grey (1990).5

Connor notes that even the British government seemed disinclined to accept that “war” was being fought in Australia. 1838 saw the last major deployment of a military regiment on this continent against Aboriginal groups (for Waterloo Creek under Major Nunn). Thereafter, the “Aboriginal problem” was left largely up to police and vigilante settlers, who became a

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somewhat paramilitary force. This forms a stark contrast with the dozens of firmly ‘historicized’ American Indian wars such as Prince Phillip’s War (1675-8) and The Great Sioux War (1876-7) – most of them involving military forces. North America has for centuries recognized firmly defined Indigenous conflicts; Australia so far has none except the Tasmanian Black War. Even the existence of this is questioned by some.

This seems partly due to the academic habit over the past few decades (rightly criticized by Windshuttle) of including too broad a variety of incidents under the ‘guerrilla resistance’ umbrella. “First contact” murders – even according to Indigenous accounts – were born of mutual misunderstanding rather than any systematic agenda.

At other times, frontier conflicts, by the admission of both parties, were actually personal grudges and crimes of individuals, and do not seem to have had a life beyond these tensions. On still other occasions, we seem to be dealing with the vague vengeance or avarice of specific leaders and small groups – as when the Tasmanians complained that “…they and their forefathers had been cruelly abused, that their country had been taken away from them,” or when Musquito explained his actions as a ‘parting of ways’ incited by white people’s lack of generosity: “white fellow he never give, mob make a rush, stock-keeper shoot plenty…. Dat de way me no come all same your house.”

For these reasons, it may now be time to locate examples of warfare that was more openly declared against settlers – especially incidents that involved more than a small group of raiders. Given that southern Queensland’s ‘Black War’ seems to have been the first case to which modern historians applied terms such as “guerrilla warfare” and “resistance war,” we will here consider how this conflict might be viewed as a historic entity similar to other named wars.

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7 See the stories of Tudor Ejai and Albert Baranga in Luise Hercus & Peter Sutton, *This is What Happened: Historical narratives by Aborigines* Canberra: AIAS, 1986, 146f, 165f.

8 For instance, in the Albert River district, certain members of the local group developed a grudge against a party of sawyers because the latter neither employed them nor allowed them access to a boat to enable them to find their own food. On this grounds decided to kill the little group The Sketcher - Early Days on the Tweed. Some Errors about the Blacks..The Queenslander, 1 September 1894 p 410.


10 Keith Vincent Smith, *Mari Nawi – Aboriginal Odysseys* Rosenberg Dural 2010, 64
B. The case for a “Southern Queensland Black War” (1843 to 1855)

1. An unofficial conflict with a historic beginning and end?

Keith Windschuttle has indicated that ‘regular’ organized resistance wars on the part of Indigenous groups are more often assumed than historically proven. For this reason, we should carefully examine how the concept of a southern Queensland ‘Black War’ arose. Obviously Laurie and Cilento borrowed the term from the name given to Indigenous-settler conflict in Tasmania, but some of Laurie’s and Cilento’s evidence seems to have come from much earlier - in fact, from pioneer accounts.

Primary amongst these was the final – indeed, posthumous, work of Nehemiah Bartley (1830-1894) – a merchant, traveler and writer. Bartley’s last book was a set of observations about contemporary Australia and its history entitled *Australian Pioneers and Reminiscences* (1896). Bartley lived in Brisbane from the 1850s until his death. His chapter on Queensland was therefore based on what he himself had experienced and heard. In this, he relates that:

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

This implies that both Bartley and his audience were familiar with a local frontier conflict that persisted from 1843 to 1855.

As was typical of Bartley’s mode of writing, he does not even bother to explain why he chose 1843 and 1855 as the dates for the beginning and end of Indigenous-Colonial conflict in southern Queensland. Fortunately, we can surmise (because he was an avid reader) that his decision was influenced by a long article in *The Empire* (Sydney) of 1854 titled: “The Rising of 1842-4.” This piece described the “simultaneous aggressive movement of the Aborigines throughout the entire colony, and along its boundaries.” It viewed this as a benchmark in “the history of the country” up to that point - the start of “warfare… universal, implacable, and incessant.”

In other respects, 1843 was hardly a random or even unexpected choice as the ‘start’ of the conflict. As early as 1869 when a history of the colony was written for *Pugh’s Almanac*, 1843 was remembered as the local date “when the blacks were now beginning to be very troublesome.”  

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11 Nehemiah Bartley.*Australian Pioneers & Reminiscences*, Brisbane: Gordon & Gotch, 1896, 167
12 The Aborigines of Australia No XIV The Rising of 1842-4, *Empire (Sydney)* 15 April 1854 p 3
13 The History of the Moreton Bay Settlement. [THE subjoined sketch of the early history of the Moreton Bay settlement was published in the first edition of Pugh's Queensland Almanac]. *The Brisbane Courier* 23 December 1869 p 6
attack Balfour’s station in direct reprisal for the Kilcoy massacre.\(^\text{14}\) He also describes a fierce attack on Helidon station in 1843 that killed some shepherds.\(^\text{15}\) In the same area, on 12 September 1843, the famous ‘Battle of One Tree Hill’ near Toowoomba occurred – one of the few named battles of this conflict, when Aboriginals routed settlers, and kept them at bay for months. It was also on the 3\(^{\text{rd}}\) of January 1843 that the Aboriginal warrior Yilbung Jenny challenged Rode to battle. In fact, between February and September 1843, all stations along the Upper Brisbane and Stanley Rivers were attacked, and many abandoned. As that area was one of the first forays of free settlement, this was a major setback.

At the other end of southern Queensland, even more dramatically, Aboriginal raids in 1843 saw the complete abandonment of Wide Bay and the Mary Valley. Significantly, that area remained deserted for 4 years.\(^\text{16}\) This included the runs of Girkham, Gigoomgam, Owanyilla and Tiaro – some abandoned two or three times.\(^\text{17}\) Soon after the attacks, the explorer Leichhardt passed through one part - the empty Eales Station. He was stunned at the loss of such good grazing land, but was quite aware of the cause, and the role of an \textit{alliance}: “(four) shepherds... killed by the \textit{united tribes}...Now there is open warfare”\(^\text{18}\) (italics mine).

Bartley’s ‘end date’ of 1855 was equally an obvious choice in terms of Indigenous conflict in southern Queensland. First and foremost, this was when (on 5\(^{\text{th}}\) January) Dundalli, one of the most recognized leaders of Aboriginal “depredations” around Brisbane, was publicly executed under very heavy armed guard at today’s GPO. This “created a sensation in Brisbane.”\(^\text{19}\) Fear of insurrection was high, as Captain Wickham’s main assistant recalled:

\begin{quote}
That morning the blackfellow Dundalli was hanged… I was ordered to get out of the city, as the blacks might be hostile. I was going up Eagle Street when the drop (the gallows) fell, and the yells of the blacks in the bushes where our railway now runs could be heard distinctly.\(^\text{20}\)
\end{quote}

The hanging is referred to in countless reminiscences, and in fact was one of the main events of Knight’s 1892 chronology of the history of early Queensland.\(^\text{21}\) It was attended by many people

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[14]{A J McConnel, ‘On Blacks’ MSS 89/206, Fryer Library}

\footnotetext[15]{A J McConnel, Some Old Stations No 2 Brisbane Courier, 30 Jan 1932 p 19}

\footnotetext[16]{H J Summer, 100 Years Of History In Newstead House Quadrilles—and A Snake In Vice-Regal Bed, The Courier-Mail 14 December 1946 p 2; Firmin McKinnon, \textit{Early Pioneers of the Wide Bay and Burnett}, Read at a meeting of the Historical Society of Queensland, on June 27, 1933), 90-97 https://espace.library.uq.edu.au/eserv/UQ:207886/s18378366_1940_3_2_90.pdf}


\footnotetext[18]{T A Darragh & Roderick J Fensham (eds), \textit{The Leichhardt diaries Early Travels in Australia during 1842-1844}, Memoirs of the Queensland Museum Culture Vol 7 (1) Brisbane 2013, 30 July 1843, p. 266.}

\footnotetext[19]{Spring Hill – an Historic Suburb – Growth from Early Days, Courier Mail, 2 Aug 1930 p 21}

\footnotetext[20]{Early Brisbane in the Fifties and Sixties – an Interesting Reminiscence, Brisbane Courier 18 January 1919: 12.}

\footnotetext[21]{J.J. Knight, ’The Sketcher: In the Early Days – LIII: The Birth and Growth of Brisbane and Environs – Events in Chronological Order from Discovery to Separation , \textit{The Queenslander}, 17 Dec 1892, p1171}
\end{footnotes}
from both Brisbane town and outlying districts. Even Rockhampton’s Mayor chose to reminisce in the 1930s about its importance:

…. readers (may)… wonder what significance was attached to the hanging of an aborigine that it should be referred to after a lapse of 75 years. When I was a child I often heard people talking about Dundalli …. Tom Connolly…. was an eye-witness and he told us that crowds hooted the officials. A regiment of soldiers was on guard to prevent a rescue.

It seems that this particular execution was viewed by colonists as the tide turning in their struggle, as it was a very dramatic (and touch-and-go) demonstration of settler might at a time when the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations were roughly equal in number.

1855 was also the year that a section of the Native Police Corps finally visited Brisbane to deal with the situation (they had been requested for years). They eventually (two years later) formed a base at Sandgate, at the time a site just outside Brisbane. The 1855 arrival resulted in almost all the “town blacks” fleeing the vicinity for a while. This presumably ended the “daily” harassment Brisbane’s citizens faced. Thus in the eyes of many, 1855 brought some sort of closure to a very drawn-out fight.

However, the picture is not that simple. Southern Queensland’s frontier hostilities neither began in 1843 nor ended entirely in 1855. In fact, there were incidents from the very beginning of settlement, and it would be more accurate to say that the very worst conflict occurred during the years between 1855 and 1869. The Hornet Bank, Cullin-la-ringo Bingera and Paddy’s Island massacres toled amongst the very largest massacres – black or white – Australia ever experienced (two cases of a dozen to a score of whites killed; scores to hundreds of Aboriginals killed). Violent Native Police “patrols” were conducted around all southern Queensland, and in a couple of exceptional incidents, even the Native Police were directly attacked:

…. when they were making their onslaught, (they) cried out in English “kill the white fellows" and (addressing the Lient.) “you bloody coward!” ….a trooper immediately fell dead, pierced by numerous spears…. 2 other troopers (were) wounded…. Lt Williams and (his) Corp resisted with determination…

It was not unusual for Australian Indigenous resistance to worsen as it progressed. In Tasmania, conflict escalated from roughly 2 attacks per year to 222 per year by 1830. Even so, generally the conflict seems to have increasingly moved towards Central Queensland after 1855.

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22 N. Bartley, ‘Blackfellow Criminals,’ *The Queenslander (Brisbane),* 11 June 1892 p. 1130

23 Aboriginal Murderer – The Story of Dundalli, *The Central Queensland Herald (Rockhampton,)* 15 September 1932: 28


25 Moreton Bay, *Northern Times (Newcastle)* 5 May 1858 p 2

2. An inter-tribal declaration of war?

What is most intriguing about this “1843-1855” conflict is the contention that – like conventional war – it involved a declaration of war on the part of a number of Indigenous groups. Two runaway convicts: David Bracewell (“Wandi”) and James Davis (“Duramboi”) were evidently the first to broadcast this ‘declaration,’ so we should examine the circumstances through which they advised the colony that it was being targeted for attack.

Bracewell and Davis had lived for years – independently of each other - amongst the tribes just north of Brisbane. Andrew Petrie picked them up during his exploratory trip in Wide Bay. To his surprise, his party was most unwelcome during this trip, though they had been through the district before (in March 1839). Davis warned the group that they would all be certainly killed if they stayed. He managed to dissuade his Aboriginal companions from immediately conducting this destruction by pretending Petrie’s boat crew were the spearhead of an immensely powerful navy. On Davis’ advise, the exploratory party retreated offshore - sleeping (fully armed) in their boat, and hurrying away at the first crack of dawn.

When this expedition returned to Brisbane, it aroused a lot of interest. According to Tom Petrie (Andrew’s son), “squatters all ran down to the river bank” – being very excited at the sight of the returning boat. That same night of the landing, the crowds “got ‘Duramboi’ and ‘Wandi’ to.... tell them about the blacks.”

It is from Henry Russell (who was an eyewitness, being part of this expedition) that we learn this ‘telling” involved spreading news of the ‘declaration of war.’ The two convicts conveyed that Aboriginal groups all over the region had decided to take vengeance on settlers for poisonings in and around Kilcoy. Davis in later years was much more reticent, but on this occasion, he graphically dramatized the threat to his audience:

Davis at this point took up the talking and went through all the scene of the (poisoning) deaths... (and) the fearsome wrath...... It was all acted over again with a reality that thrilled us. .... (He said there) came a cry for vengeance (from the blacks)... (that) a great corroboree was held…..I could not if I would, and would not if I could, make an attempt to recreate the maniacal frenzy.

Brisbane’s residents had been fearing something like this ever since July 1841, when Aboriginal crowds made "declarations of revenge" over the public hanging of Merridio and Neugaril at Brisbane’s Windmill, but now, because Davis had just come from a mixed (inter-tribal) group of about 1,000 angry Aboriginals – a larger population than Brisbane itself at that

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27 A Petrie, ‘Adventures in the Early Days of Brisbane,’ The Courier, 10 April 1863, p. 3
28 H Russell, The Genesis of Queensland, 279-280
31 A Laurie, The Black War in Queensland, Royal Historical Society of Qld Journal Vol.1: No.1, September 1959, 157
time\textsuperscript{32} - and because this declaration had been made at the latest Bunya Festival (December 1841 – March 1842), which drew tribes from as far away as today’s Dubbo, Grafton and Bundaberg, there was genuine concern. Some squatters began to write home of their fears that “the tribes (will) get solid behind the Kilcoy fiasco.”\textsuperscript{33}

We can be fairly confident that this is an accurate report of how the ‘declaration’ was announced, because Bracewell’s and Davis’ accounts were almost immediately written up and sent as an enclosure in May 1842 with the official report on Aboriginal affairs by Stephen Simpson (in his role as Commissioner for Lands) to the New South Wales Governor, Sir George Gipps. In this report, Simpson quoted Bracewell as saying:

… there was a great meeting of native tribes, 14 or 15 in number, in the vicinity of the great Bunya Scrub…. These tribes vowed vengeance and said they had already had some but were not yet satisfied. The blacks at the Toor (gathering ring) were much infuriated.\textsuperscript{34}

In the report, Simpson emphasized that Bracewell’s statement was “fully confirmed” by Davis.

Simpson seemed more concerned with verifying the Kilcoy poisoning than with the gravity of the situation, but meanwhile the German missionaries, who had just then travelled to the bunya lands in the hope of establishing a base there, made a report at the same time: the Aborigines were “in a very excited state on account of the (Kilcoy) poisoning.”\textsuperscript{35} Reverend Schmidt said they told him they would henceforth “revenge themselves on the whites, whenever they happen to meet them”.\textsuperscript{36} This was similarly transmitted to the Governor, in this case through their letter to John Dunmore Lang.

Thus by June of 1842, the Governor had two letters concerning the imminence of war. Gipps procrastinated on what to do. He seems to have decided to simply wait and see what eventuated. This was doubtless because he had only just (in April) declared the northern region a ‘Bunya Reserve’ for exclusive Aboriginal use – an act which effectively sanctioned the thousands who now wished to exterminate the settlement. Conversely, Gipps was also trying to encourage settlers to move into nearby regions. He had only in February opened the entire district to land sales. Perhaps to remind himself, Gipps nevertheless marked the threatening passages of the letters in red.\textsuperscript{37}

We can be fairly certain that this ‘inter-tribal declaration’ was not a concocted story, not only because it comes from two separate sources but because it was also – in a roundabout manner – voiced by Aboriginal figures from a variety of groups at this time. Consider the statement of Dalaipi in Petrie’s account. Dalaipi was locally one of the most important elders in the region,  

\textsuperscript{32} The population in 1845 stood at 890. By 1855 this had increased to over 2,000.
\textsuperscript{34} James Bracewell, ‘Statement of Bracewell & Davis as to the Supposed Administration of Poison to Some Blacks by White Men,’ in Simpson Letterbook, ed Gerry Langevad, \textit{Some Original Views around Kilcoy, Queensland Ethnohistory Transcripts Bk 1: The Aboriginal Perspective Vol1:1}; 1982, p. 5
\textsuperscript{35} The Bunya Mountains, \textit{The Queenslander} 21 May 1892, 987.
\textsuperscript{36} Karl W E Schmidt, \textit{Report of an Expedition to the Bunya Mountains in Search of a Suitable Site for a Mission Station}, p.5, Acc 3522/71 in Box 7072, JOL.
custodian of the Pine Rivers bora and most probably one of the Bora Councillors instrumental in sending out kooringal (‘executionor warriors’) such as Dundalli and Yilbung to inflict their “depredations” on whites. He bluntly told Tom Petrie:

…. This (our killing of whites) is nothing…. What a number were poisoned at Kilcoy!...
They (the whites) stole our ground where we used to get food, and when we got hungry and took a bit of flour or killed a bullock to eat, they shot us or poisoned us! Why did the white man not stop in his own country, and not come here to hunt us about like a lot of kangaroo? If they had kept to their own land, we would not have killed them (emphasis mine). 38

Trespass of hunting grounds was indeed the usual reason for a declaration of war in traditional Aboriginal society, and settlers had done a great deal of trespassing, but why would an Aboriginal leader based on the Pine Rivers be so concerned about an occurrence in another group’s territory (at Kilcoy)? Obviously vengeance for the Kilcoy massacre loomed large in Indigenous conscience at this time much as it was also highly controversial for the white community. 39

It would seem that not only were Aboriginal groups colluding on this endeavor, but they were forewarning their white friends, in widely separated places. Thomas Archer at Nurum Nurum outstation (towards Woodford) at this time received a note “from a sable (Aboriginal) messenger, telling me that two of Mackenzie’s men had been murdered by blacks within a few miles of my camp… (and) warning me that I had better be on my guard as they might possibly serve me the same if they caught me napping.” 40 Meanwhile but around the same time in Kangaroo Point (nearly 100 kilometers to the south), John ‘Tinker’ Campbell tells us in the booklet he wrote, that he received a messenger sent by Multuggerah, a leader around the Gatton/Toowoomba area, who informed him: “the blacks were rising” and to warned him not to travel to the west: “Baal you go, Mr Campbell!” 41

The concept of a united front seems to have endured for some years. Constance Petrie tells us that even a decade later, “old men” visiting her father would discuss Kilcoy with him and re-enact the deaths. 42 Similarly, a year after the initial “declaration” Ludwig Leichhardt travelled

38 Dalaipi in Petrie, 1904: 183-184.
42 Petrie, Tom Petrie’s Reminiscences 1904: 149.
to Baroon (the heart of the coastal bunya gathering) and witnessed “several powerful main figures …among the warriors at Burun (Baroon)” all painted red (the body-paint for war). These warriors, he noticed, “found fault” with “those who join the whites.”43 During the corroboree pantomime Liechhardt attended, a warrior sang a war song wherein:

….he reproaches those who no longer come to hunt kangaroos, and to catch possums, and who don’t take part in the battles… His accused answers: ‘I do not live in the dwelling of the whites, the whites are angry with me. I have no pipe, no tobacco, no hatchet. I live in the bush.’44

This somewhat mocking performance suggests that the more militant elements within the groups were still shaming those who had been seduced by the novelties of Western civilization, and were no doubt recruiting them to their perspective.

3. An effective offensive?

If Aboriginal resistance was truly resistance and not a genocidal slaughter, then there needs to be some evidence that Indigenous forces posed a threat worth considering, and one that had inflicted enough injury on its opponent that it could incite a measured response.

The number of white casualties in this 1843-1855 “black war” period was hardly huge – estimated around 174 and reaching a total of 230 by 1861 (when the conflict escalated but was moving further north).45 This would nevertheless have been quite significant for the tiny settler population of this time. In fact, this translates as a death rate of roughly one in ten (as the white population rose from roughly 1000 to 2000 over this period). Moreover, the exactly ‘personalized’ (targeted) killings of shepherds, travelers and others; the sacking of huts, drays and stores; the continual destruction of vast quantities of stock and crops – hundreds to thousands of head at a time – must have been both spectacular and severely taxing.

Chas Melton, who lived through this period, describes “outrages of weekly – indeed almost daily- occurrence.”46 These were mostly cases of Indigenous robbery and harassment:

…. residents were often alarmed by half a dozen stalwart blacks coming to their doors and demanding flour, tea, sugar, tobacco, and rum. ... (They) frequently swooped down on the huts of the settlers and carried off all they could lay their hands on, sometimes killing those who offered any resistance. ....Captain Wickham, the Government Resident,

43 Darragh & Fensham (eds), The Leichhardt Diaries, 1 Jan 1844 379-380
44 Darragh & Fensham (eds), The Leichhardt Diaries, 1 Jan 1844 379-380
45 A Record in Black and White: Conquest of the Wilderness, The Brisbane Courier, 15September 1923, p. 19. Captain Coley however put the figure at 250 as previously mentioned by Raphael Cilento.
46 Early Brisbane in the Fifties and Sixties – an Interesting Reminiscence, The Brisbane Courier 18 January 1919 p 12
was often requisitioned for police protection, but owing to the scarcity of men was unable to afford much relief.⁴¹

A quick scan of contemporary newspapers reveals the abundance of engagements. Of course, their accuracy may in some cases be disputed, but their frequency over a large stretch of territory can hardly be denied. When even a few of these are mapped against the local geography (see Figure 1) it is obvious that significant gains were made by Indigenous parties, especially at the beginning of the conflict.

Basically, the alliance of tribes decided that the most effective attack would be to ruin in its entirety the squatters’ economic base – destroying all flocks and herds. This was apparently common knowledge to the settlers. For instance, in 1844, at the height of the conflict, the correspondent from Moreton Bay informed The Sydney Morning Herald that:

> From their manners, and the partial conversation they have had with the white inhabitants, they seem determined to annihilate if possible the whole of the stock in the district (italics mine)⁴⁸

This was equally Russell’s memory: that across the region, the groups were colluding to drive off all livestock: “wherever they were.”⁴⁹

The testimony of squatters themselves demonstrates that this measure – right up to the 1860s – was spectacularly effective in frustrating their attempts at settling the land. To give just a few examples amongst numerous incidents, the first owner of Maroon (1840s) was “chased off by the blacks.”⁵⁰ In 1847, John Stevens on the Condamine River found “the natives surrounded the hut and… ordered him and his men to leave the station” – which he did. Then they drove off all his cattle.⁵¹ In 1848, Mr Blyth and Mr Chauvel after only four days on Fitzroy Downs were “obliged to abandon it – the blacks having driven off four hundred sheep, killed one of their men and speared (another).”⁵² Between 1854 and 1858, it seems Thomas Dowse and others made three unsuccessful attempts to set up huts at Sandgate, but were repelled each time and forced to flee.⁵³ John Ross around 1860 tried to settle Cockatoo Creek but likewise found “the Dawson blacks were too bad and he had to retrace his steps towards the Burnett.”⁵⁴

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⁴⁷ Early Brisbane in the Fifties and Sixties, p 12
⁴⁸ Moreton Bay, Sydney Morning Herald, 10 September 1844, p.4.
⁴⁹ Henry Russell, Genesis of Queensland, Brisbane 1888, p. 328.
⁵⁰ The First Settlers, Queensland Times (Ipswich) 21 April 1944 Edition (daily), p 5
⁵¹ Moreton Bay. The Sydney Morning Herald 5 May 1847 p 3
⁵² To the Editor of the Moreton Bay Courier. The Moreton Bay Courier 2 December 1848 p 2
⁵³ Colonial News Moreton Bay Wanton Outrage by the Aborigines, Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal 31 December 1853 p 2; To the Editor of the Sydney Morning Herald. The Sydney Morning Herald 30 November 1857 p 8.
⁵⁴ Cracow -The First Owner The Central Queensland Herald (Rockhampton, 17 November 1932 p 31
Indigenous tactics sufficed to drive settlers away from areas for months to years at a stretch, and dissuaded newcomers from venturing near.
4. A lived reality?

As this ‘war’ was a guerrilla conflict and therefore never officially announced on the part of the Colonial government (regardless of what the Aboriginal tribes may have declared), we need to search for evidence of its ‘historicity’ amongst the tone of daily life around Brisbane at this time. In other words, when we read between the lines, was this ‘a society at war’?

The prevailing architecture would suggest so. Brisbane in 1842 was already a garrison town – built around a Military Barracks flanked by a guard house, cell block, and officers’ quarters. Meanwhile, on Ipswich’s plateau there were sentry boxes to keep watch over cattle and crops.

Round timber (log) tops and bottoms were the preferred materials in Imbil in these years, and we learn that this was to ensure impenetrable walls, usually with “a lot of big auger holes… to shoot through if the blacks made a raid.” Likewise in nearby Kin Kin, the first settler said he:

….built it (our hut) very strongly, and loop-holed the doubly-thick slabs, so that, should occasion require it, we might be enabled to shut ourselves up in it as in a citadel, and defend it against their attacks.

It seems on the outskirts of Brisbane buildings were all of this style. In 1851, before describing his own ‘incident’ with Aboriginals near Ipswich, an anonymous squatter informs us that all huts on “the frontiers” are “usually made” in this heavily fortified manner, with “port holes” instead of windows. Melton calls them “hinged wooden shutters” and tells us they “fitted over a frame somewhat like the hatch of a ship” whilst “the walls … were pierced with augur holes.” Doors were similarly “barricaded ….for the purpose of resisting the assaults of the natives.”

When, after a few attempts (repelled by Aboriginal hostility), a house was finally built in Sandgate, it was on a hill and lined with gun slots. Its owner slept with his gun and shot at any Aboriginal who came too close. Likewise Bald Hills’ first homes were raised “in sight of each

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55 Rod Fisher, The Brisbane Scene in 1842, in Rod Fisher & Jennifer Harrison, Brisbane: Squatters, Settlers and Surveyors Bris History Group Papers No 16 2000 Brisbane, 19


57 Hector Holthouse, Gympie Gold Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1973

58 A.J.B., Beseiged – A Legend of Cootharaba.,The Queenslander 6 December 1919, p.5

59 Domestic Intelligence Ipswich The Moreton Bay Courier 23 August 1851 p 2

60 Nut Quad The Contemplation of Contrasts, The Brisbane Courier 8 July 1911 p 13

61 Domestic Intelligence Ipswich, The Moreton Bay Courier 23 August 1851 p 2

62 German Station from 1838 Old Memories, The Queenslander 10 January 1925 p 11
other for fear of blacks molesting the settlers, who kept clear of the dense scrub…. for the same reason. 63 These Bald Hills houses similarly sported “apertures for directing fire against the blacks.” 64 Even closer to Brisbane, the stately Newstead House (Breakfast Creek) that was Captain Wickham’s residence had its subterranean area (“hidden room”) excavated into the ground “just in case there was trouble with the blacks.” 65

The atmosphere of these days is best summed up by renowned Queensland author Rosa Campbell Praed. She grew up not far from the infamous Hornet Bank massacre during the 1850s. Praed’s “earliest memory” was fear and conflict: her horror at seeing “a black face” peering between the half-closed shutters of her parents’ hut; her memory of being completely alone with her mother, as “father” went out hunting for “the black murderer of an out-shepherd;” and her relief when her father arrived back just in time to capture the second prowler. 66

Campbell Praed remembered a world when:

…the women practiced at targets with firearms, and the men would ride home with a sinking feeling in their hearts, fearing for their wives and children. Often I heard father describe how each evening coming in from the run, he used in cold fear to mount the hill overlooking the humpy, and draw free breath when he saw it lying quiet and unharmed. 67

Similarly, James Cash of what became Albany Creek, remembered how, as a boy at this time, he lay awake all night in terror listening to corroborees some distance from the family homestead. 68 As men were absent for days in the dangerous scrubs, we are told that “their womenfolk fought the demon of fear day after day with a heroism that can scarcely be understood by those who have not experienced its agony.” 69

In other words, fear of Indigenous attack was a palpable reality during the 1840s and 1850s in southern Queensland. Brisbane citizens repeatedly requested the continuation of a military guard to deal with the “known hostility of the aborigines to the presence of the white man upon their hunting grounds.” 70 Perhaps Brisbane did not feel in the thick of war most of the time, except during repeated robberies or the execution of Indigenous leaders, but at those times, the town too feared for its safety. One pioneer recalled that during the 1850s whenever he returned late at

61 “Wyampa” The Genesis of Bald Hills, Courier Mail 12 May 1934 p10
64 “Wyampa”1934 p10
65 Anon, Early Brisbane History Vol. 1, Zillmere Local Studies mss, n/d p 20.
66 Flashback to Queensland’s Pioneering Days - A black peered in while the bread was setting The Courier-Mail 2 April 1949 p 2
68 Thomas J. M’Mahon, Cash’s Crossing – Picturesque Dairying Area, The Brisbane Courier 5 April 1930, p.11.
69 Nut Quad The Contemplation of Contrasts, The Brisbane Courier 8 July 1911 p 13
70 Rod Fisher, ‘The Brisbane Scene in 1842’ in Fisher, 2000, Brisbane: Squatters, Settlers and Surveyors, 19
night he made a point of staying at Jerry Scanlan’s hotel (before Brisbane) “as the blacks were often bad.”/1 Similarly, Mrs Melton recalled that on account of Aboriginal hostility during the 1840s-1850s, “few ventured into suburban areas after nightfall.”/2 Her husband could add that the “principal topic of conversation” amongst Brisbane’s citizens had become “the depredations of the blacks.”/3 Such angst may account for the decades being known as the “hungry Forties” and “the fighting Fifties” amongst the locals./4 Thomas Dowse was remembered as a “Fifties fighter” – apparently on account of his vigilante efforts in Sandgate. Another pioneer dubbed himself a Fifties “Battler” – perhaps partly for this reason./5

5. A ‘still remembered’ event?

Wars are often considered wars because they are remembered as such. Today 1855 is honoured by many Aboriginals in Brisbane, as it has been for a few decades, marking the hanging of Dundalli on January 5th. There are also occasional reminders of the 1840s-1850s conflict here and there – a sign concerning the Battle of One Tree Hill at Toowoomba; some streets, tracks and houses named after persons such as Dalaipi and Dundalli. Otherwise, the notion of protracted resistance conflict in southern Queensland does not occupy the public imagination.

However, during the 19th Century as we have seen, the view was rather different. Just a few decades after the event, the key events feature prominently in J.J. Knight’s In the Early Days (1895) and Henry Russell’s The Genesis of Queensland (1888)./6

Of course, the 1843-1855 Black War was not treated as a historically-defined conflict in the manner of the Great War or even the Maori Wars, yet Arthur Laurie’s and Raphael Cilento’s promotion of the general idea has affected the historical reading of this ever since. Thus we find Glenville Pike referring to a nebulous ‘Black War’ in 1978, /7 whilst conflict historian Malcolm Prentis placed the whole period (which he puts a bit earlier - 1838 to 1848) as the zenith of the “black war on the frontier.”/8 Likewise, military historian Peter Denis concluded that the “war in Queensland” definitely started in Brisbane and nearby districts “around 1840, continuing to about 1860.” He likewise views it as moving into central Queensland in the 1850s and 1860s./9

71 Early Brisbane in the Fifties and Sixties – an Interesting Reminiscence, Brisbane Courier 18 January 1919: 12.
72 Woman’s World. Gold Wedding. The Brisbane Courier 6 February 1919 p 11
73 When Woolloongabba was Wattle Scented – Old Pioneers and Predatory Blacks, The Brisbane Courier 18 June 1921 p 16
74 ‘Nut Quad’ Depredations of the Fifties, The Brisbane Courier 8 July 1911 p 13
75 ‘Battler,’ Early Fights-Blacks and Whites Sunday Mail (Brisbane) 13 February 1938 p 40. ‘Battler’ had a troubled family history that impelled him to use this pen name, yet it is significant that ‘battling’ was viewed as a characteristic of this generation.
76 For example, see Reviewer, The Genesis of Queensland, The Queenslader, 14 January 1888, p.51.
78 Malcolm Prentis, 1975, A Study in Black and White: The Aborigines in Australian History, Methuen Australia Sydney p 27
Ray Evans’ study of Moreton Bay’s frontier history over this period plotted a similar escalation of violence beginning after 1841/1842.  

All this is quite significant, in that none of these writers seem to have known of Bartley’s dates, or of the full circumstances of the war. Nevertheless, they arrived at similar conclusions concerning a spike in frontier conflict at this time in southern Queensland.

C. The 1843-1855 Black War as a Guerrilla/ Terrorist Conflict

In the above section, we have presented evidence for the ‘Black War’ being a historic reality rather than a rhetorical exaggeration, whether or not the dates are exactly as Bartley states. The next task is to consider the question Reynolds continually raised: “but what kind of war?”

Eckley Wilton defined guerilla warfare as low-intensity, irregular, disruptive, small-scale engagements which utilize natural hideaways and blur the division between civilian and combatant.  This obviously bares some similarity to what is continually observed in Indigenous-Colonial violence and for this reason, the tag of “guerrilla warfare” is frequently applied to frontier conflict. However, military historians such as Jeffrey Grey struggle to honestly place Indigenous resistance within the terminology of “war”. Grey could find “no resemblance” between Indigenous efforts and post-1945 guerrilla warfare. He contrasted the pitiful numbers of whites killed in Indigenous affrays (usually less than 5 per engagement) compared to the 18,000 involved in the Maori wars and the 1,843 armed settlers the Maori warriors routed in one incident alone (of which 22 were killed).

Keith Windshuttle expanded this perspective - alleging Aboriginal resistance was neither conventional nor guerrilla warfare. He could find no evidence of broader “military, political or patriotic objectives” within Indigenous aggressions - no hint of organization, intelligence, command strategy, or declarations of war. He concluded that “resistance” activity was usually a crime wave of “revenge and plunder” led by “detribalized” Aboriginals who victimized isolated,

83 Jeffrey Grey, The Military and the Frontier, 1788-1901: 31
85 Windschuttle 2004, Guerrilla Warrior and Resistance Fighter? 221
defenseless civilians. In his view, the robberies and assaults of Aboriginal criminals had been blindly accepted as forms of resistance.

Of course, Windshuttle stance has limited support, yet even on the other side of the ‘History Wars’, Henry Reynolds had to confess that compared to the United States, New Zealand or South Africa, Australia seems devoid of dramatic military confrontations. At best, Reynolds paints a continent immersed in a “state of petty warfare.” Likewise, Jonathan Richards’ detailed analysis of our paramilitary equivalent of the US Cavalry – the Native Police corps – only further highlighted the nebulous secrecy of its operations. Richards noted an almost negligible death toll on the part of the troopers and officers, suggesting conflicts were massacres rather than battles.

Given such conclusions, the very idea that we need to better define Indigenous resistance ‘wars’ might seem absurd. However, we have little other option. Unless we adopt Evans and Thorpe’s or Timothy Bottoms’ concept that the conflicts were largely genocide, or Windshuttle’s view that all Indigenous reaction was a ‘crime wave,’ we must use the terminology of ‘warfare.’ As we shall see, the problem may be our presumption that Australian frontier violence should necessarily fit the mould of guerilla conflicts overseas. In the following, we will analyze the nature of the 1843-1855 war in terms of the style of tactics observed in other parts of Colonial Australia.

1. Charismatic leadership? The case for wily loner-leaders (‘cheeky fella rogues’)

Eckley Wilton tells us that charismatic leadership is essential to founding and maintaining guerilla movements, yet its presence within Australian resistance wars has been doubted for decades. Although various figures have been put forth as “resistance leaders” (Pemulwoy, Musquito, Saturday /Windaryne, Wayler, Jack of Cape Grim, Dundalli etc), the absence of evidence for them making declarations, schemes and heroic ‘last stands’ (bar a few exceptions)

88 Henry Reynolds, Forgotten War (Uni of NSW 2013) 53-4
92 For instance, ‘Old Moppy’ is said to have hung onto a sapling and waved his tribe to continue fighting despite being mortally wounded. William Clark, Explorer Walker – Organiser and First Commandant of the Native Police,, The Brisbane Courier 28 December 1912 p 10
has encouraged writers such as Keith Windschuttle and Stephen Sheaffe to negate the entire notion and interpret these individuals as nothing more than murderers and thieves, devoid of broader objectives.\footnote{Stephen Sheaffe, Dundalli – resistance fighter or murder, Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland Vol19:3, August 2005, 682, 697.}

Even writers more sympathetic to the idea of guerilla leadership such as Denis Foley and Naomi Parry have felt uncomfortable placing these figures firmly within a ‘resistance’ framework. They either find them too complex for such a narrow definition, or find the whole notion of a singular instead of plural leadership a misfit given how Aboriginal society traditionally operates.\footnote{Denis Foley, 2007, ‘Leadership: the Quandary of Aboriginal Societies in Crisis 1780-1830, and 1966,’ Macfarlan, I & Mark Hannah, Transgressions: critical Australian Indigenous Histories, ANU Aboriginal History Monograph No.16, Parry, N., ‘Hanging no good for blackfellow: Looking into the life of Musquito, 2007, Macfarlan, I & Mark Hannah, eds, Transgressions: critical Australian Indigenous Histories, ANU Aboriginal History Monograph No.16.}

This hesitancy is perhaps unwarranted, as according to their contemporaries these figures were charismatic enough to arouse broad support - not only amongst their own often disparate people but occasionally across tribal boundaries.\footnote{Naomi Parry, ‘Many Deeds of Terror’ – Windshuttle and Mosquito, Labour History No. 85, Nov 2003, pp.207-212 (208) Lowe, D., 1994, Forgotten Rebels: Black Australians who Fought Back Sydney: ICS & Associates p 6,8,10,13,23} Within southern Queensland, Bracewell names a host of figures as being involved in the war at different stages – Commander, Cowander (Make-i-light) and Diamond; later Zrombugongo, Pamby-Pamby, Twarr, Wungoe Wungoe and Buckabolu.\footnote{Davis in Lergessner 2007, Death Pudding, 216-7.} More importantly, they inspired followers.

One of the later leaders of the 1843-1855 conflict, Dundalli, was someone whom even the white community agreed “the blacks….had been in the habit of looking up to.”\footnote{Domestic Intelligence- the Paris Exhibition,The Moreton Bay Courier 6 January 1855 p 2} He was also, they said, someone they viewed as “their great man.”\footnote{The Native Police, Geelong Advertiser and Intelligencer 23 September 1854 Edition: DAILY. p 5} Aboriginal supporters spent three months “prowling about Brisbane and its neighbourhood” demonstrating their hostility when he was awaiting trial.\footnote{Dundalli – Local Misgovernment, The Moreton Bay Courier 28 October 1854 p 2} Equally, white writers conceded that Dundalli, Make-i-light (=Cowander) and Billy Barlow “had become kind of heroes” to their people. They remembered Aboriginal groups openly declaring their desire to rally behind them, making statements such as: “Cowander will kill more white men. Let us follow him!”\footnote{J J Knight, In the Early Days, The Brisbane Courier 10 November 1892 p 2} In other words, some sort of charismatic leadership seems to have been operating here, albeit different from that of other parts of the world.

Presumably this model from southern Queensland can be applied elsewhere. For instance, Gideon Lang in 1865 noticed that Bussamarai (Eaglehawk/ Old Billy) of south-west Queensland...
“had sufficient influence and ability to convince five entire tribes to combine and attempt the expulsion of the whites from the country.”

However, there are other problems. Some of these figures were at times as ruthless to their own people as they were to whites. This is typical of guerilla and terrorist leadership, which is often controlling, dictatorial and brutal, in order to maintain military objectives. Sometimes this extends to intimidating locals and evicting and exterminating non-conformist elements. American Indian war chiefs including Sitting Bull have certainly been accused of displaying such traits.

Equally, Denis Foley has pointed out that these leaders manifest behavior “uncharacteristic” of Indigenous society in terms of their traditional social/kin obligations. On this basis he suggests that the entire concept of a “resistance leader” was a new development in Indigenous society, born of the conflicts. Certainly these figures behaved in an unusual fashion for Indigenous society – not only in the sheer scope of their authority but in their desire to “pass on” the mantle of resistance to other figures – sometimes in a hereditary fashion: Musquito training Tom Birch (Kickerterpoller); Dundalli investing in Billy Barlow; ‘Old’ Moppy giving his authority to his sons (Young Moppy and Multuggerah); Pemulwoy bestowing leadership on his son Tedbury.

Even though this explains some of the anomalies, we are still left with figures that do not neatly fit the “war chief” or “insurgent” mould we find in North America or more recently in the Middle East. Perhaps the explanation for this is that Australian ‘guerilla leadership’ was of a rather different type.

In Australian Indigenous mythology, the most celebrated leaders – particularly in conflict stories - were not law-abiders but law-breakers. Repeatedly, the main subject is the “cheeky fellow.” It is always the “clever man” who is hailed, and he is hailed as “cunning…a rogue.” This suggests that Aboriginal people may not have expected their leaders to make bold ‘last stands’ but rather to be clever enough to outsmart the white man and live to fight another day.

More importantly, as one settler noted, the Indigenous understanding of the “arts of war” was sleuth, silence and (when required) treachery. Thus their leaders – unlike their North America counterparts – were mostly tricksters and “cheeky fellows.”

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102 Lowe, 1994, *Forgotten Rebels*, 13


104 Denis Foley, 2007, 179, 184

105 Lowe, D., 1994, *Forgotten Rebels* p. 11


108 See Reynolds, 1982 *The Other Side of the Frontier* 152.
American equivalents - had no interest in speaking openly or truthfully to their prosecutors, even during their trials. Truth was divulged only to the select few.

It seems that a number of “resistance” leaders – like “clever men” - viewed themselves as possessing supernatural powers. Pemulwoy thought he was invincible to bullets, which he tried to deflect with his hands. In southern Queensland, Multuggerah was remembered as a prophet:

Multuggerah…. told him (Campbell) the flood of 1841 would soon come back, and then not return until the piccaninnies of that time were old men. It came back in 1845, and the date of its second return is 1893! 109

Medicine men and medicine women were held in awe because they seemed to have powers, but also because they dared to venture into sacred waterholes, travel at night, camp alone and behave somewhat beyond the Law. It would seem that resistance leaders were equally expected to be secretive, self-reliant loners.

With this in mind, it does not seem a coincidence that Dundalli’s name meant “wonga pigeon.” As Indigenous writer Alex Bond explains:

... ‘pigeon’ was the name of various Indigenous resistance leaders – for instance, ‘Pigeon’ of the Kimberleys, who was also known as Jandamara. The reason for this is the nature of the wonga pigeon. It is one of the largest Australian pigeons - a solitary, bold, very persistent bird. It is nomadic - it walks everywhere. It hides in the undergrowth but will fight boldly to protect its nest. There is an Illawara story of a wonga pigeon bleeding to death as it seeks its mate across countless waratahs.110

Like a wonga pigeon, Dundalli operated alone quite often, walked very far and hid in dense bushland. Bond adds that – again like a wonga pigeon – Dundalli was a ‘man on a mission:’ “dahn meaning ‘man’ and dali emphatic, direct, quick or urgent – someone who was on their way to accomplish something.”111

Another difference from guerrilla leaders in other parts of the world was that Indigenous society did not permit leaders to place themselves at the head of their group. This may explain why they blurred into the background to a greater extent than their equivalents elsewhere. For example, Multuggerah – who led so much of the Upper Brisbane/ Darling Downs resistance – was at one point given a breastplate naming him “King of the Upper Brisbane Tribe”. He was proud of this object, but when his group had its meaning translated, they became furious about the implications and ordered Baker (a convict living with them) to return the offensive item to settlement on pain of death. 112

109 Floods and Droughts. The Western Champion and General Advertiser for the Central-Western Districts (Barcaldine) 14 March 1893 p 3

111 Alex Bond, 2009,.10;
If Aboriginal resistance leaders were modeling their behavior on self-motivated, wily, secretive, self-depreciating loners, their vulnerability becomes understandable. It is interesting that despite the high regard in which they were held, they were often betrayed by their own people — and Dundallli was no exception. Operating sometimes beyond the bounds of tribal law, and dependant for support on their ability to perform ever-more daring solitary acts, resistance leaders continually walked a tightrope between becoming outlaws in their own society and placing themselves in mortal danger. It seems that many eventually did succumb.

2. Coordination - through what means?

As early as 1975, Malcolm Prentis expressed his frustration that Indigenous resistance in Australia did not appear to have been deliberately organized except at a local level. As we have seen, this has been used to argue that Indigenous resistance could not even be considered guerilla warfare. By 1995, Peter Dennis and others were arguing that the egalitarian, non-cohesive nature of Indigenous society prevented the development of inter-tribal alliances to a level that would permit complex military strategy.

Many so-called “resistance” conflicts were certainly personal, local disputes. The motivation of other cases remains “unknowable“ – often due to reticence on both sides. This lack of information continues to cloud our capacity to interpret these conflicts. The circumstances of the American Indian Wars are much better known, with the result that military strategy can be reconstructed with considerable ease. For instance, one of the Sioux Wars began with a couple of Indian youths killing settlers to show their bravery to each other. The rest of the tribe was then divided as to whether to turn the youths in to American authorities or rally behind them, but meanwhile the US Cavalry conducted a punitive attack, and thus war developed. Many Indigenous-Colonial conflicts in Australia may have originated in this fashion, but we simply lack sufficient detail - particularly from Indigenous parties - to decide. Nevertheless, we know that small-scale societies (e.g. Californian Indians) generally attack in separate but simultaneous forays that are pre-planned by a number of groups. Aboriginal-Indigenous engagements seem to operate similarly, suggesting a similar strategy at work, with similar coordination.

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114 Malcolm Prentis, 1975, A Study in Black and White, p 27


117 Rout M Utley, The Indian Frontier of the American West 1846-1890 Uni of New Mexico 1984, 78

118 Chris McNab The Native American Warrior 1500-1890 London: Amber 2010, 175f
In the case of the 1843-1855 war, correspondents reported in 1852 that several stations along the river in the Burnett district were “attacked at three different points simultaneously.” At Miriam Vale, contemporaries also describe “a meeting of different tribes” deciding to attack the head station. Many other instances abound: on the Logan River and at Lockyer Creek, portions of “various powerful tribes” were witnessed assembling “according to a pre-concerted plan” and then committed a raft of “outrages” such as destroying an entire maize crop in one night, hunting cattle and bailing up travellers.

The incidents just listed above, which relied on local gatherings to fine-tune their strategies, probably drew their overarching objective from decisions made at the Bunya festival gathering, presumably reviewed or reiterated at the next Bunya gatherings (as settlers claimed). Large-scale gatherings such as for the Bunya festival were said to germinate more coordinated inter-tribal resistance, as the Moreton Bay Courier expressed in 1858:

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

This is supported by evidence given in 1861 by James Davis before the Select Committee into the Native Police. When asked the purpose of inter-tribal gatherings, he answered that apart from serving the various customs they subscribed to, the gatherings were called to “hatch mischief against whites.”

In other words, those most familiar with inter-tribal gatherings had no doubts that military strategies were devised through these gatherings, and could involve anything from two to twenty tribes depending on the level of coordination required. Indeed, it seems that settlers were so accustomed to region-wide collaborations that they feared broader unity erupting, and this suspicion sometimes put whole towns up in arms. As already mentioned, during the ‘uprising’ of 1842-1844, even friendly groups were turning against settlers and unheard of groups were assisting hostile ones. It was felt that the entire east coast of Australia was being organised against the settlers:

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119 Moreton Bay Burnett District, Freeman's Journal (Sydney) 29 April 1852 p 11
120 Richard R Ware, Bucca Bucca (The Sketcher), Queenslander 5 Dec 1908 p 62
121 Moreton Bay Courier, 26th February 1848, Vol.2: No. 6, 89; Moreton Bay, The Sydney Morning Herald 8 November 1844 p2
123 Fifty Years Ago; Catarrhed Sheep, The Brisbane Courier 2 June 1906 p 12
124 Moreton Bay. Northern Times 29 May 1858 p 4
125 Dr Simpson – Davies Minutes & Evidence to the Select Committee into the Native Police Force, Qld Legislative Assembly 1861 in Langevad, Some Original Views Around Kilcoy: 12
126 Proposed Removal of Military Protection from Moreton Bay, Moreton Bay Courier, 22 June 1850 p 2
....so simultaneous, indeed, and so general (that)... a belief would be encouraged that the onslaught.... was the result of a perfect organization... From Wide Bay to Port Phillip, the organization seemed to extend, and scarcely a day elapsed without tidings reaching the city (Sydney) of some remote station being driven in, some flock driven away or speared, some shepherd or hut keeper being wounded or killed. 127

We already referred to “14 to 15” tribes who attended the 1842 bunya festival declaring their combined aggression. We have a fair idea which groups these were because Petrie, Schmidt and Davis all give us a listing of “bunya attendees” around this time, numbering roughly 14-15: the groups from Logan district; Moreton Bay Islands; Burnett River; Wide Bay district; Bundaberg; Mt Perry; Gympie; Bribie; Fraser Island; Gayndah; Mt Brisbane (= Mt Cootah & D’Aguilar Ranges); Kilcoy/ Esk and Brisbane/ Enoggera. Davis tells us that at least 9 or 10 of these (those most affected by the Kilcoy massacre) subscribed to the coordinated effort,128 and we know that the first offensive was spearheaded by Kilcoy/ Esk and Sunshine Coast peoples, as McConnel (as mentioned before) names these groups as the parties involved, and notes they lost the most people in the poisonings. Henceforth, most aggression seems to have been carried out along the upper Brisbane/ Stanley Rivers, around the Burnett/ Wide Bay, and around the Pine/Caboolture region.

From larger to smaller gatherings, military strategy seems to have been relayed through a system of messengers (William Clark calls them “post men”) who walked or ran even through enemy territories, their white body paint and cockatoo feather headdress ensuring they were granted immunity.129 Walker, the first Commandant of the Queensland Native Police, also found – from what his troopers explained – that a variety of signals were coopted into the attacks. For instance, during regular raids on crops or stock, raiders (who could number 100 or more) had sentinels on guard who used a system of prearranged signals130 These were evidently the same silent hand-signals used in tracking game and stalking an enemy.131 There was also a system of tree marking involving series of marks or chops, 132 and most of all, smoke signalling.

Smoke signalling was definitely used in resistance activities. When John Campbell and his party fought off a raiding party whilst climbing the hills to the Darling Downs, they knew a second attack was being arranged at the steep pinch in front of them as “all this time we could hear their signals passing alongside the Sugar Loaf Mountain to the Red Hill, some two miles ahead of

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127 The Rising of 1842-4, p 3
130 Early Days – Abos Fearsome and Resentful but Brave and Kindly, The Richmond River Herald and Northern Districts Advertiser 3 June 1932 p 3
131 William Clark, Explorer Walker, 1912 p 10
132 William Clark, Explorer Walker, 1912 p 10
us.” As he ‘heard’ signals travelling such a distance between hills, we must assume Campbell was referring to the crackle of fires sending smoke signals to groups ahead.

Certainly smoke was regularly used to summon groups over vast distances – for instance, to the bunya festival. Smoke signals were used to relay to other bands the movement of groups of whites (e.g. explorers), and to warn of impending attack. When police launched a punitive patrol around the Pine Rivers and Sandgate areas in 1857, the camps are reported to have smoke-signalled “up and down the coast”, with the results that the police encountered empty encampments on arrival. As camps were often located near a high point or hill, within sight of another high point which itself lay behind another camp, a virtual relay of signals could be rapidly sent.

To vary such signals, fires in old hollow trees funnelled smoke into single, double and triple trunks. Otherwise, bark from saplings was moulded into tubular shapes for specific messages, the “improvised chimney stack” being placed over a smoky fire on a hill, and the construction extended as required (for different messages) by placing additional lengths of bark (cones) within each other. This bark funnel was then secured perpendicularly against some high tree with boogaroo cord. This resulted in “compressed smoke, shooting up to a great altitude in spiral columns” which, even if issued from distant ranges, was “visible for long distances.”

As a military strategy, Walker informs us that smoke signalling was the main “code” parties used during travel to “communicate with their detached mobs” and to decide “the locality of meeting places.” This included calling others to attack, as was witnessed near the Murray River (Victoria): “the escaped blacks notified the tribes on the Murray by signal fires to attack the hut, which they did at night to rescue the others.”

Through smoke signalling, groups from even hundreds of kilometres away would turn up “almost simultaneously” at assigned spots. This may explain how many hundreds of warriors could be assembled at fairly short notice to attack outstations.

Intelligence from ‘insiders’ and the associated blurring of distinctions between civilians and combatants is another means modern guerilla groups communicate. Reynolds discovered that this was similarly true in Colonial Australia: settlers’ accounts speak of their homes being

133 Campbell, 1936:19.
135 Jones, Ochre and Rust, p.99.
136 To the Editor of the Sydney Morning Herald. The Sydney Morning Herald 30 November 1857 p 8;
137 William Clark, Explorer Walker, 1912 p 10
138 William Clark, Explorer Walker, 1912 p 10
139
140 D.S.S., The Blacks in the “Forties.” The Coburg Leader (Vic.) 8 March 1912, p 4
141 J C Bennie, ‘The Bunya Mountains – Early Feasting Ground of the Blacks, 1931, p 2
watched constantly; and of children and women gathering information for the warriors. Certainly at Gracemere, Aboriginal parties took advantage of their boss’s absence to sack the homestead whilst other “insiders” – an Aboriginal youth and women who had been living with the workers – are known to have been instrumental in the attack on Patrick McEnroe’s property at Surat.

Decoys and diversions extended this tactic. Multuggerah is known to have sent old women out to drive off part of a herd in one place so that he could attack in another spot whilst the settlers were occupied. Bussumarai had women flirt with armed settlers to distract them and assist an attack; a young Aboriginal worker near Ipswich – friendly with settlers - was used to entice a shepherd out where he could be speared. Even more ingeniously, the headman of a group near Fitzroy kept a squatter chatting and smoking over dinner whilst his raiders - some distance away - drove off 400 sheep, speared the shepherds and pursued the remnant another 70 miles.

3. From pitched battle to ambush warfare

Another reason some scholars deny the existence of “proper” guerrilla warfare in Australia’s frontier conflicts has been the apparent lack of evidence for a dramatic shift in tactics. Aboriginal society, we are told, was simply too static – bound to its “highly ritual” interpretation of war. Indigenous hit-and-run attacks are paraded as evidence of this, even though this same element (surprise attacks) is elsewhere considered a key characteristic of guerilla warfare.

However, ambush activities during the decades of invasion may signify a radical departure from traditional warfare. Except for small-scale revenge or execution raids, war in Indigenous Australia was almost always an extremely formal arrangement wherein one group issued a challenge and the other side accepted and then met the opponent at a pre-determined spot, where a pitched battle (more a series of tournaments) was conducted between neat lines of scores or hundreds of combatants, all within very strict sets of rules – see Table 1. Virtually all the many pullen-pullen (“fights”) explorers and settlers witnessed around southern Queensland were of this sort.

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143 Reynolds, History of Tasmania, 54
144 Reynolds, The Other Side of the Frontier, 105
145 Bartley, Australian Pioneers and Reminiscences, 206
146 Domestic Intelligence Ipswich, The Moreton Bay Courier 23 August 1851 p 2
147 Random Rhymes. The Moreton Bay Courier 24 February 1855 p 4
148 Collins 2002: 25
149 Domestic Intelligence Ipswich, 23 August 1851 p 2
150 To the Editor of the Moreton Bay Courier. The Moreton Bay Courier 2 December 1848 p 2
152 Petrie, 1904: 44-48, 160-164
\textbf{TABLE 1: TRADITIONAL PITCHED BATTLE IN SE QLD (Petrie 44-48, 160-164)}

1) Contestant groups move entire camp to ridges surrounding open plain – women move camp first  
2) Set up camp according to direction of home country (N S E W) with youths (kippas) separate again  
3) All men paint selves up and decorate selves with feather down  
4) Women dance & sing on battle field – wave yam sticks with branches of bushes tied to  
5) War whoop from camp (top of hill)  
6) Warriors file into field in companies (tribal groups) in line - sets of twos, singing war song:  
   a. led by “great men” war champions (6 in pairs)  
   b. followed by youths in middle  
   c. seasoned warriors behind (6 in pairs)  
7) Women plant yam sticks in ground as troops enter, and await warriors’ arrival  
8) Youths open battle – for 20 minutes – toss weapons from distance (nb this ‘proving self in battle’ is their first duty after bora initiation)  
9) Seasoned warriors move in – toss spears/ boomerangs/ waddies from distance – for 1 hour, old men direct from behind,– thin shields deflect  
10) Try chase opponents off and away from field towards ridges or beyond  
11) Once someone is wounded, friends shout “tor!” - appearance of ‘first blood’ ends the battle  
12) All sides retreat and break – squat down 100 yards apart, treat wounds  
13) When rested, two warriors from one side rush at opponents’ side, brandish spears etc and threaten (challenge)  
14) Two from other side respond  
15) Group of four or five each side duel (hand-to-hand)  
16) Long fight (up to 5 hours): turwan (big man – best champion) accepts single-handed combat at close quarters with opponent's turwan (usually avenging death of relative, blamed on opposing side) – duel with thick shield and waddy (and carry stone knife in teeth)  
17) Once one drops weapons, or shield is split, start knife duel – stab or gash thighs or back (not allowed to stab chest- offenders killed)  
18) Onlookers eventually separate turwans  
19) Various small duels (including women’s yamstick fights) of other major champions & aggrieved parties  
20) All retire back to camp, go hunting etc for evening meal  
21) Repeat steps 1-20, for over a week  
22) All depart for home country, usually on good (cooperative) terms
Equally, despite the assumption that Indigenous engagements with whites were furtive ‘hit-and-runs’, early sources repeatedly describe pitched battles. In the southern Queensland war, when Aboriginal groups were surprised whilst stealing sheep or cattle,\textsuperscript{153} or whilst peacefully camped, most sources describe warriors as lining up and “giving fight” rather than fleeing.\textsuperscript{154} Davis (Duramboi) related that in his personal experience, southern Queensland warriors were obliged by custom to stand their ground when violently attacked, regardless of the context.\textsuperscript{155} As one witness expressed it “the blacks of those days were not curs, and would stand up and face the white man’s gun.”\textsuperscript{156} Leichhardt likewise noted: “the black with his weapons is no coward. Calmly he meets his enemies.”\textsuperscript{157} Thus at Coomba (near the Bunya Mountains) warriors stood for four hours against a barrage of guns and hurled boulders upon a group of squatters.\textsuperscript{158} On the Upper Burnett, 500 warriors “marched on the head station” and “with loud voices” demanded that the overseer’s wife be turned over to them, and then ransacked the station (the owner wisely disposed of this holding).\textsuperscript{159}

The situation seems to have been similar across Australia. Reynolds marks many confrontations with “massed warriors.”\textsuperscript{160} In 1841 towards the Murray River (The Islands NSW and Rufus River by Lake Victoria) there was a series of confrontations involving some 200 to 400 warriors who stood their ground - in neat files - against groups of 11 to 68 armed whites (some of them former police). The warriors sometimes forced the whites to retreat and flee their drays, almost surrounding them with a crescent-shaped front.\textsuperscript{161} As late as the 1890s, Janadmarra in the Kimberleys began his resistance with open combats, only later moving onto ambush tactics.\textsuperscript{162}

In this sense, the confrontations with Native Police and vigilantes, which were doubtless massacres given the obvious technological advantage whites enjoyed,\textsuperscript{163} may need to be re-

\textsuperscript{153} Domestic Intelligence Ipswich, 23 August 1851 p 2


\textsuperscript{155} Simpson – Davies Minutes & Evidence to the Select Committee into the Native Police Force, Qld Legislative Assembly 1861 in Langevad, Some Original Views Around Kilcoy: 12

\textsuperscript{156} ‘BATTLER,’ 13 February 1938 p 40

\textsuperscript{157} T A Darragh & Roderick J Fensham (eds), The Leichhardt diaries Early Travels in Australia during 1842-1844, Memoirs of the Queensland Museum Culture Vol 7 (1) Brisbane 2013, 3

\textsuperscript{158} J E Murphy & E W Easton, Wilderness to Wealth 1950 (NLA) 30-1

\textsuperscript{159} Moreton Bay Burnett Region. Freeman’s Journal (Sydney,) 29 April 1852 p 11

\textsuperscript{160} Henry Reynolds, The Other Side of the Frontier, Penguin 1982, 102


\textsuperscript{162} Howard Pedersen & Banjo Wooramurra, Jandamarra and the Bunnuba Resistance Adelaide: Griffin, 1995: 145.

\textsuperscript{163} Bill Thorpe (1995), Frontiers of Discourse; Assessing Revisionist Australian Colonial Contact
considered as defensive battles in that – despite the odds - the victims stood their ground as best they could.

Ambush-style guerrilla fighting seems to have evolved as an extension of revenge or execution raids,\textsuperscript{164} yet perhaps its prevalence was born of necessity rather than a choice. Bartley noted that due to the impact of gunfire, the “dash in the open” gave way to a “crafty ambush behind some huge rock or tree.”\textsuperscript{165} Even when ambush-style attacks became the norm, raiding parties still often utilized the ‘shock effect’ of assembling and rushing stations and huts with hundreds of painted warriors (see Table 2).

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Some Indigenous Military Strategies during ‘Resistance Wars’}
\begin{tabular}{|l|}
\hline
\textbf{ATTACKING OUTSTATIONS & HOMESTEADS} \\
\hline
1) One or two ‘forward scouts” make “friendly” visit for surveillance of situation, and to lure any residents away from their armaments \\
2) Masses of warriors jump out from hiding – either from along creek bank, behind ridge or behind trees (show of force – scores to hundreds of warriors involved) \\
3) Harass residents into fleeing or otherwise club/spear residents \\
4) If residents retreat to buildings, lay siege by removing roofing/ firing roofing/ spearing through holes/ blocking gun slots/ bending or breaking muzzles \\
5) Remove/ drive off horses (means of escape) \\
6) Sack buildings of all contents \\
7) Take all herd, flock and stored goods \\
\hline
\textbf{RAIDING / DISRUPTING HERDS & FLOCKS} \\
\hline
1) Create a distraction for stockmen/ station owner/ shepherds to keep them away \\
2) Take over flock/ herd \\
3) Funnel herd/ flock in pre-planned direction: \\
\hline
\hspace{1em} a. into mountains or dense scrub (if harassing settler into leaving) \\
\hspace{1em} b. past rows of hidden warriors (if killing on-the-spot) \\
\hspace{1em} c. into difficult-to-follow terrain (if moving entire herd/ flock to “bush pens”) \\
\hline
\textbf{ATTACKING A MOVING PARTY (e.g. DRAYS, TRAVELERS)} \\
\hline
1) Initial challenge: present large masses of menacing warriors (at a safe distance) and call out threats \\
2) Continually follow travelers for long distances, closely monitoring their actions and relaying ahead to other bands (via smoke signal, runners etc) \\
3) Wait till part of travelling party is sufficiently removed from rest, or when their armed members are away from rest of travelers \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textit{Historiography, Journal of Australian Studies}, 46, pp. 34 – 45
\textsuperscript{164} Reynolds, \textit{The Other Side of the Frontier} 1982 105; Connor 2002: 3
\textsuperscript{165} Nehemiah Bartley \textit{Australian Pioneers and Reminiscences}, 1896, 167
4) At a pinch or other site presenting enough cover, surprise the vulnerable/isolated portion
5) Advance upon group with bodies of warriors chanting war songs (file out from cover and stand ground)
6) Simultaneously hurl spears, boomerangs etc. at the group
7) Sack dray/supplies
8) Follow rest of party, from a safe distance
9) Mock and harass
10) When a manageable portion of remaining travelers come to a suitably vulnerable position, attack this portion with another large mass of warriors – advancing out and standing ground
11) Repeat as often as required

DEFENDING A CAMP (during surprise raids by Native Police or vigilantes)

1) Send out alert (call to arms) when enemy spotted
2) Men form a line (barrier) and hurl spears and other projectiles
3) Women and children run for cover (disperse widely into bush)
4) Where possible, engage attackers individually (one-on-one, hand-to-hand combat)

4. Full-time ‘guerilla bands’ with ‘bush pens’?

There is evidence that not only warfare but lifestyle changed enormously on account of the resistance wars. In fact, the increasing instability of life on the frontier may have engendered full-time “guerilla bands.” As groups increasingly quit traditional lifestyle in order to survive, they developed some rather interesting traits. Consider, for example, this 1886 exhibit in Brisbane of an “uncivilized blacks’ camp”:

…. The weapon or article of European manufacture is the tomahawk of iron, doubtless plundered…. Other signs of the dawn of civilization are bullock-bones about the camp. .... In accordance with another practice, the gunyahs are so situated that an enemy cannot approach from any quarter without being seen by the occupants of at least two gunyahs. ... (There are) cattle spears, to be dropped on beasts from boughs of trees over-hanging their tracks, and the lighter spears for other purposes.... (italics mine)\textsuperscript{166}

In southern Queensland, five or six areas – most notably the Bunya lands (densely-forested hills of the Blackall Ranges and Bunya Mountains), Bribie Island and Fraser Island – were repeatedly described by Colonists as “strongholds” in “broken and unfrequented country”\textsuperscript{167} from which offensives were launched.\textsuperscript{168} They are also said to strategically use creeks and swamps to bog would-be pursuers.\textsuperscript{169}

\textsuperscript{166} An Interesting Model, The Brisbane Courier 8 March 1886 p 2

\textsuperscript{167} To the Editor of the Moreton Bay Courier, The Moreton Bay Courier 17 October 1857 p 3; see also Brisbane Courier, 8 November 1932, 15

\textsuperscript{168} ‘The Strongholds of the Aborigines,’ Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal, 20 September 1851 p 7
There was also a continual complaint that the ‘wild’ southern Queenslanders were guilty of “depredations” had changed their diet entirely to mutton and beef, and were becoming professional plunderers. Worse, they were:

...convert(ing) some of the more savage and isolated tribes into bands of savage plunderers, who will place their reliance for the means of subsistence entirely on the lawless forays which they are enabled to make from their fastnesses upon the property of the settlers.  

Considering the horrific price Aboriginal groups paid for slaying even a single bull or sheep, the decision to subsist entirely off herds and flocks was an act of obvious defiance. When entire tribes took this dangerous step and decided to live off, and even store, plundered flour, grain and stock, they unwittingly became units quite similar to terrorist cells and guerrilla bands – ‘robin hood’ type bands that survive in hideouts, stock up on goods and weapons, and regularly plunder the enemy.

Again, this seems to reflect a continent-wide pattern towards a ‘guerilla lifestyle’ much as might be encountered in Vietnam or Afghanistan in more recently times. There are reports of Aboriginal groups travelling and attacking at night - in both Victoria and Tasmania - something unheard of in traditional times. Everywhere, open camps were abandoned for safer, secluded locations. Everywhere groups are said to be posting lookouts on perpetual sentry duty and stockpiling of weapons at or near camps. Victorian Aboriginals became so dependent on their rocky hill hideouts that squatters dubbed them “Children of the Rocks.”

Perhaps the most intriguing element in this change is the appearance in so many places – Tasmania, Wide Bay, the Darling Downs, Western Victoria, Walgett, New England - of “bush pens.” Aboriginal raiding parties built these near their camps. For example, Sergeant Freer located three such yards in one spot alone (Towel Creek off the Macleay River) “most

169 M. B. Fine Press. Moreton Bay., Colonial Times (Hobart,) 20 April 1852; Moreton Bay. The Sydney Morning Herald 10 September 1844 p 4
170 Summary of News – Domestic and Foreign, The Moreton Bay Courier 10 June 1848 p 2
171 John Connor 2002, 41
172 Port Philip, The Cornwall Chronicle 16 September 1843 p 3
173 Lyndall Ryan, The Aboriginal Tasmanians Uni of QLd St Lucia 1981, 119
175 John Connor The Australian Frontier Wars 1788-1838 UNSW Sydney 2002, 88
177 Jan Critchett, ‘Encounters I the Western District,’ in Brian Attwood & SJ Foster, Frontier Conflict – The Australian Experience: 55
178 Connor 2002: 109
ingeniously constructed.” Clearly the aim of these pens was to provide on-going supplies of meat, as evidenced by discarded carcasses and bones in the vicinity, but why were entire flocks (sometimes in thousands) stolen and driven to these pens? Were the evolving “guerrilla bands” trying to wrest the pastoral industry out of white hands?

Quite possibly they were. In 1848, Aboriginal informants advised a Darling Downs squatter that their overall “plan” was to kill all whites posted at the head stations, sack their stores, “waylay” shepherds minding flocks, and take over all their sheep. Likewise, near Boulia, grazier Alexander Kennedy discovered through this corroboree song (which one of his workers translated for him), that the local tribe aimed to take over the powerful magic (cattle rearing) that had changed their world:

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

5. Exploiting the Power of ‘Payback’

Libby Connors surmises that many resistance killings – at least around southern Queensland – were a form of legal payback, very exactly targeting persons who had committed crimes against tribal law. This might again be used to paint Indigenous resistance as a static continuation of traditional practices, yet Henry Reynolds suggests payback was being co-opted into provoking, terrorizing and exhausting settlers into quitting their runs. Guerilla warfare typically relies on exhaustion and provocation – a ‘war of attrition’ that protracts conflict to the point of expending the enemy’s willpower, or creates such anxiety that the enemy quits an area. Hence the application of ‘payback’ to the new situation of European invasion could constitute a significant adaptation.

In Indigenous society, an infringement on tribal law saw the offender or an assigned representative face off a volley of spears and boomerangs. Otherwise, revenge parties or assigned executioners were sent out to exact legal punishment through a surprise attack. As even natural deaths were attributed to the hostility of foes, attacks of this sort sometimes seemed unwarranted, which may explain ‘unprovoked’ attacks some settlers suffered.

180 To the Editor of the Moreton Bay Courier. The Moreton Bay Courier 2 December 1848 p 2
182 Libby Connors, pers. commun, 2013.
183 Reynolds, Other Side of the Frontier, 48, 105, 78, 127-8
The sleuth, dogged determination and apparent treachery of payback attacks could work very well as a form of resistance, in that it conveyed that no settler was ever safe from Indigenous justice. Payback highlighted the importance of reciprocity—the fact that no slight would be forgotten or left unavenged.

In this regard, it is worth noting that Indigenous groups themselves often stated that they were engaged in revenge attacks through their actions against whites and Colonial authorities recognised their killings as such. Pemulwuy, the Sydney “resistance” leader, is often now considered a caradhy, a man whose position in the Bidjigal tribe empowered him to dispense justice. Similarly, Indigenous writers such as Dale Kerwin and Alex Bond insist that Dundalli was a kooringal—an ‘executioner’ sent out by bora councilors to dispense justice. This has also been the conclusion of Dundalli’s main biographer, Libby Connors, and it may explain why so many ‘resistance leaders’ seem lone figures only vaguely backed up by their people (although typically hundreds were indirectly involved in these attacks).

6. Inflicting unending sabotage

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Australia’s frontier conflict is its relative lack of violence on the part of Indigenous raiders, compared to Indigenous/Colonial wars elsewhere. In fact, the whole history of frontier conflict in Australia reads more like the cattle raids of Irish epics. The chief aim seemed not to burn down villages or slaughter thousands but to economically ruin or ‘starve out’ one’s opponent. Repeatedly, this was enacted by removing or destroying immense quantities of their cattle, sheep, corn and similar goods, and disrupting all other means by which they operated. Certainly much of this produce was eaten or stored, but the sheer scale of the destruction indicates it was mostly conducted to frustrate attempts at settlement—removing the means by which settlement sustained itself.

Economic sabotage might seem far removed from a guerilla agenda, but (as the Irish allusion suggests) this kind of harassment and similar “white war” (boycott) is one of the oldest forms of guerilla warfare. As this practice had “no precedent” in traditional Aboriginal warfare (which always allows opponents breaks for food gathering and hunting), John Connor - the Senior

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185 John Connor 2002: 44
Historian for the Australian War Memorial - identified it as an innovation born of the invasion. It was probably also - as Henry Reynolds alleges - the most effective resistance strategy Aboriginal people ever used. All over the continent, it allowed Aboriginals to drive out settlers and re-occupy their lands.

Sabotage is a powerful weapon. Early Moreton Bay settlement was nearly starved to extinction in 1827 through repeated destruction of its maize fields, resulting in Captain Logan posting sentries day and night. Well into the 1840s crops of the fledgling Brisbane colony and the neighbouring free settlement (Nundah) were so heavily attacked that residents feared they would not survive. In Sydney, few if any out-farms escaped attack - Aboriginal groups stripped and burnt all plots and food stocks they could. Sydney groups even used the threat of attack as a negotiating tool with officials, to demand the return of specific territory.

Many variations were made around this theme: killing only the best of any stock; destroying all storehouses; scattering, hamstringing (wounding) and terrifying flocks and herds to reduce their usefulness; burning good pasture, removing all house-contents (which compelled the destitute owners to leave); spilling all bags of flour (and making clear the intent by calling out “raggar! Raggar! = go away! Go away!”), and ill-treating and plundering timber-getters until they abandoned their tree-felling work.

As the toll of this onslaught consumed many acres of crops and regularly destroyed or dispersed flocks and herds of 300 – 2000 head each, it inflicted huge economic losses on would-be settlers. It forced many pioneers to abandon their runs.

It was obviously a form of terrorism. For instance, at a Port Philip property, an Aboriginal party drove off all the horses (which were also the main means of transport for the settler), littered the fields with bodies of 506 head of cattle and then moved on to the next run where they destroyed another 487 cattle and 86 bullocks. Meanwhile they taunted the settlers, constantly evading their gunfire and yelling out:

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190 John Connor, *The Australian Frontier Wars 1788-1838* UNSW Sydney 2002: 21
191 Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier*, 113
194 p Turbet., *The First Frontier: The Occupation of the Sydney Region* Dural: Rosenberg, 2011, 95
195 Connor 2002: 40-2
199 Moreton Bay. *Geelong Advertiser* 29 August 1850 p 2
200 Port Philip, *The Cornwall Chronicle* 16 September 1843 p 3
Come on! Come on! Borack gammon! (= this isn’t a joke)... Port Philip police can’t come!... Plenty soon you dead!201

Disrupting lines of communication, transport and supply was a related form of sabotage, and we know it was often deliberate because Aboriginal raiders (for instance, Multuggerah’s group between Gatton and Toowoomba) openly stated that their mission was to intercept all communication and supply. In this particular case, the high road to the Downs was effectively cut by diverting drays off the road with saplings, preventing them reversing with logs, and thereafter frightening off the dray teams.202 Similarly, when Jackey Jackey, another fighter, took refuge in the Bunya lands, he sent a message out of his intention to halt white movement towards what is now Enoggera and Newmarket (Three Mile Scrub): “he said he would come down to the Three-mile Scrub and kill white fellow - that he would kill any white fellow that goes that road” (italics mine).203

Bullock drays, perhaps on account of the “life blood” of produce and supplies they carried, were frequently attacked – for instance, at Mt Edwards,204 on the Northern Rivers,205 near Brisbane206 and on the Gwydir River.207 One of the most successful resistance actions in Australian history involved the halting of dray-traffic at Winding Swamp,208 To add further “bedlam” some raiders set large packs of dogs onto the drays and horses.209

Elsewhere, transport was disrupted by frightening travellers off important pathways, creek crossings210 or mountain passes (e.g. Cunningham’s Gap).211 Perhaps the best example in the case of the 1843-1855 conflict is Logan Road in Brisbane where it passed between Mount Gravatt, Mt Thomspon and other hills. As this area held springs and caves and a host of camps, German settlers virtually “ran the gauntlet” to travel up and down the road. There were a number of spearings in the area, and the Germans developed sideboards for their wagons to protect themselves from flying spears.212

201 Port Philip, The Cornwall Chronicle 16 September 1843 p 3
202 The History of the Moreton Bay Settlement. The Brisbane Courier 23 December 1869 p 6
203 The Aborigines - Moreton Bay Sydney Morning Herald 23 February 1847, p 2
204 The Queenslander (Brisbane, Qld. : 1866 - 1939) Saturday 5 December 1925 p 10
205 Murderous Abos of Long Ago and white settlers’ savage reprisals, The Richmond River Herald and Northern Districts Advertiser 22 November 1935 p 2
206 Moreton Bay, Empire (Sydney, NSW : 1850 - 1875) Monday 5 April 1858 p 4
207 Jessie Hunt A Wayside Cemetery Where Pioneers Sleep The North Western Courier 4 September 1933 p 14
208 Coulthard-Clark, C., 1998, Where Australians Fought, 14
210 Mary Guthrie "By the Pleasant Watercourses." The Brisbane Courier (19 March 1927 p 23
211 Moreton Bay. The Cornwall Chronicle (Launceston) 23 January 1847 p 63
212 Do you know your Brisbane – Mt Gravatt and Eight Miles Plains Sunday Mail 28 July 1929 p 23
A related tactic was to scare off, intercept and kill mail men (e.g. the Stradbroke mailman to Brisbane, and another between Nanango and Gayndah in 1851)\textsuperscript{213} or simply take their mail.\textsuperscript{214} Aboriginals knew the strategic value of controlling mail as they were often called upon to deliver notes and letters, and suffered the consequence of the contents.

Apart from halting supplies and reinforcements, such disruption served to increase the isolation and vulnerability of settlers:

(We were) so alone and isolated... the interior silence and black darkness so suddenly engulfed us ... (and) further out, all across the plain... as far as we could see... were lights from the fireplaces of the blacks.\textsuperscript{215}

7. Psychological warfare: mocking, bluff, harassment and humiliation

As the above suggests, another feature of frontier conflict that has puzzled observers was the amount of harassment and mocking behavior Aboriginal displayed. Again, this might not seem a specific tactic, but in fact terrorism often operates at a psychological level. It employs shock tactics: unexpected, unpredictable, sometimes brutal actions that will help create an atmosphere of universal anxiety and fear.\textsuperscript{216} This is done to provoke the enemy.\textsuperscript{217} Although violence is one form of such mayhem, continual harassment, bullying, threats, humiliation or shows of force can be used with equal effect. The goal either way is a loss of face - lowering enemy morale.

A common complaint during the 1843-1855 conflict in southern Queensland was that it was becoming impossible to entice people into working or residing along the frontier from “the Downs to the Bay” on account of the anxieties and on-going small-scale harassments people were regularly subjected to.\textsuperscript{218} This highlights the effectiveness of such measures.

Aboriginal parties would simply make a show of force – appearing in great numbers – particularly stretched along hills and ridges\textsuperscript{219} - to threaten and intimidate whites – sometimes doggedly following and harassing them for hundreds of kilometers.\textsuperscript{220} Other times they proved

\textsuperscript{213} Moreton Bay., \textit{Empire (Sydney)} 24 March 1851 p 2
\textsuperscript{214} Murderous Abos of Long Ago, \textit{The Richmond River Herald and Northern Districts Advertiser} 22 November 1935 p 2; The Early Days – Reminiscences of Charles Parce, \textit{The Capricornian (Rockhampton,)} 4 November 1922 p 47
\textsuperscript{215} Geoffrey Dutton, \textit{The Squatters}, Ringwood: Viking O’Neal 1985: 20-21
\textsuperscript{217} David Kilcullen, 2009 \textit{The Accidental Guerrilla}: 30-2
\textsuperscript{218} The Wilderness Subdued – Pastoral Settlement. \textit{The Brisbane Courier} 21 May 1901 p 13
\textsuperscript{220} Jessie Hunt, A Wayside Cemetery Where Pioneers Sleep, \textit{The North Western Courier} 4 September 1933 p 14
eerily invisible, keeping just one step ahead of their pursuers (a common complaint of the Native Police Corps), or daily harassed and threatened womenfolk as soon as the men left for work. Such “shows of force” and surprise appearances terrorized travelers and explorers. Even at homesteads, for example, Zillman’s property near Brisbane, Aboriginal parties sometimes made a “mysterious demonstration” of numbers.

Another common ‘psychological ploy’ was to boldly enter – sometimes in hundreds – any home, garden or hut they passed – sometimes in broad daylight, in front of white occupants, taking whatever they wished, and threatening violence and death to any who resisted. This act seemed aimed at showing “who was in charge” as during this 1856 example from Breakfast Creek:

...five or six of them entered the premises of a person residing there, and helped themselves to the garden stuff most liberally and unceremoniously, telling the woman left in charge that they knew "whitefellow had gone away," and defying her to make them leave the premise. Another woman was ordering several of them off, when a blackfellow spat in her face and used some grossly insulting language.

The full context in this particular case was that Aboriginal groups were daily chased across the ‘town limits’ of Breakfast Creek by police and for decades on, considered these ‘boundaries’ a battle line across which any white attempting to settle was considered fair game.

The tactic of continual robbery and insult was regularly employed around the Northern Rivers, Burnett, and Brisbane regions. Occasionally, it involved uprooting building stumps and desecrating (stamping and dancing on) household graves.

Other times it consisted of announcements, such as when Jandamarra told people to “spread the word” throughout the Kimberleys stations that he was “killing whites.”

221 Mary Guthrie, "By the Pleasant Watercourses." The Brisbane Courier (Qld. : 1864 - 1933) Saturday 19 March 1927 p 23
222 Local Intelligence The Courier 5 Sept 1861 p 2
223 Moreton Bay, The Sydney Morning Herald 5 May 1847 p 3
224 Moreton Bay, Sydney Morning Herald 20 May 1856 p 5
226 Murderous Abos of Long Ago. The Richmond River Herald and Northern Districts Advertiser 22 November 1935 p 2
227 Moreton Bay. Empire (Sydney) 5 April 1858 p 4
228 Brisbane’s Suburban Beauties – A World of Fair Scenes described with Pen and Camera No XIV Windsor. The Brisbane Courier 13 October 1906 p 12
229 Dawson Valley History. Morning Bulletin (Rockhampton) 11 November 1947 p 8
form of denigrating taunts, as when a group were shot at near Oxley Creek but laughed and shouted: ‘Shoot, shoot and then where you white fellow go?’

Grace Karsken detected that a great deal of Indigenous interaction with whites at this time was conducted as parody and mocking. This raised the spirits of the assailants and humiliated and confused the enemy. Such mocking included wearing clothes in an inappropriate manner; engaging in actions that magnified the weaknesses of whites; and successfully fooling settlers with *gammon* (nonsense tales, lies).

A great deal of court “evidence” given to white authorities from Indigenous sources seems to have consisted of such *gammon*, which may explain the many confusing and dishonest statements. Thus the effort of scholars to try to unravel Indigenous motivation or strategy from these statements in the witness box, let alone from other scant verbal interchanges with whites, may well prove futile.

Humour and mocking often manifested in the actions of resistance leaders. Yilbung, a Brisbane-region leader, was once imprisoned and flogged, He cheerfully visited his tormentors as soon as he was released, and (unbeknown to them) stole a valuable tobacco box virtually from under their noses. He then gave this away to a gardener for a bag of sweet potatoes. Similarly, Jandamarra in the Kimberleys would shoot off the hats of white intruders as a playful warning.

The organizer of the ‘Bathurst War’ – Windaryne - walked undetected some 120 miles to Parramatta to surprise the Governor by attending his annual feast. Windaryne cleverly had the word “peace” stuck in his hat, and went around smilingly shaking hands. This unexpected visit ensured his safety but also demonstrated to the Governor his genius for infiltrating the settled regions (after a short-lived peace, Windaryne’s parties continued their aggressions, as the settlers did not give up their forays).

7. The shock of the new: circumventing alien technologies

Finally we need to assess the role of technology in guerilla tactics. It has been suggested that Aboriginal resistance made such limited use of Western weaponry because it was basically a static culture bound to

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231 A Working Man., *Police Protection Wanted*, Brisbane Courier, 7 May 1878:3


233 Petrie 1904: 169.

234 Howard Pedersen & Banjo Woomurrung, *Jandamarra and the Bunnuba Resistance*: 3-4

its traditions, or because it viewed firearms as “cowardly.”  

Certainly 19th century guns, steel and horses were completely unfamiliar to Aboriginal Australians and presented a serious challenge. However, Australia, unlike other Colonial forums, never permitted the trade or sale of firearms into Indigenous hands, and their use was even forbidden or restricted amongst “friendly” Aboriginals workers. Thus very few reached the hands of warriors. As well, the expansion of free settlement was a blitzkrieg compared to the rest of the globe - conducted in mostly 40 years (1840-1880). This meant that guns and horses could never become deeply entrenched in Indigenous culture in the manner they did on the American Plains or in Africa.

Aboriginal groups consequently had little option except to attempt to remove or disempower these alien technologies, and this is exactly what we find they did. There are many accounts of Aboriginal war parties breaking, hiding, stealing and dampening guns and ammunition. In some cases they would plug up the portholes from which shooting was conducted, or even rush up to the muzzles protruding from fortified huts, seize hold of the barrels and attempt to bend or break them. 

Horses were similarly maimed, killed or driven into the bush. John Campbell recalled that during the Darling Downs invasion, the killing of a horse “would be counted by them as a great victory. The tail being taken as a trophy would be whisked in the first white man’s face they met.” Trapped in his hut by assembled warriors, one man near Surat found his Indigenous foes taking all the horses – evidently to prevent his escape. When help arrived, he hastened to secure the remaining one.

Firearms and horses that were used against whites – for instance, in Victoria, Wide Bay and Tasmania – were used by the occasional individual, usually persons who had spent enough time around settlers to master their firing (e.g. Tunnerminnerwait, Wayler and Musquito). As the raiders themselves admitted, limited access to ammunition further impeded the usefulness of their ‘catch’. Thus although Jack Napoleon of Cape Grim stole and stockpiled firearms and Wayler boasted that she

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237 For example, John Campbell, The Early Settlement of Queensland; 1936: 20, ‘Battler,’ Early Fights—Blacks and Whites Sunday Mail (Brisbane) 13 February 1938 p 40

238 Domestic Intelligence Ipswich, 23 August 1851 p 2

239 Geoffry Blomfield, Baal Belbora, 1981: 35.

240 John Connor 2002, 88

241 Campbell, 1936: 19

242 Domestic Intelligence Ipswich, 23 August 1851 p 2

243 Keith Vincent Smith, Mari Nawi – Aboriginal Odysseys Rosenberg Dural 2010 (114)

244 Reynolds, H., 1982 The Other Side of the Frontier Melbourne: Penguin, 110
had taught her people to “kill plenty of white people” using muskets, few whites died from their bullets.²⁴⁵

Apart from removing the whites’ weapons, raiding parties worked to circumvent them. Some rushed the bullets en masse, knowing that chaos and mass of numbers would limit shooters’ capacity to target individuals. Another method was to attack only in thick jungle or high grass, allowing maximum cover or enabling some to sneak up on armed settlers. Others threw themselves to the ground or immediately slid behind large rocks or trees whenever guns were fired.²⁴⁶

A similar tactic was to capitalize on weaknesses in the new weapons. As Reynolds noted, muskets (especially early varieties) were often inaccurate and slow, so raiding parties rushed the shooters between re-loadings,²⁴⁷ knowing that the velocity of their spear-throwing (and warriors deliberately carried several when confronting guns) could excel gunfire.²⁴⁸ Other groups kept themselves just slightly out of firing range (e.g. during the Rufus River battles), or timed attacks during long wet seasons when they knew ammunition and guns would be damp and difficult to work. By taunting and teasing settlers to expend all their gunpowder, it was similarly possible to strike in earnest only after ammunition had been exhausted. For example, for four hours an attack was kept up at Wabro Station (New England) until ammunition ran short.²⁴⁹ Longer sieges of even a week are reported.

What clearly demonstrates the real problem regarding firearms was simply limited access is that other new elements - iron and glass – had a quite different story. These materials could be obtained even as discarded rubbish if not directly traded, so they spread rapidly into local toolkits and weaponry.²⁵⁰ When drays or storehouses were sacked, iron tools, nails, tomahawks, shears knives and metal scraps were removed in large quantities, and traded to the furthest regions of the continent.²⁵¹ All camps within the vicinity of homesteads and towns seemed to have rapidly replaced stone with iron and glass, modifying these fragments to better suit their intended use. Club heads were fitted with spikes of nails, horseshoes were beaten into spearheads, spears were fitted with points made from broken shears or shards of glass – and these were used against settlers.²⁵² Certainly in hand-to-hand fights in southern Queensland, William Clark noted knives of shell had once been used, but after settlement, they “abandoned (these) for blades of sheath knives, or broken shear blades.”²⁵³

Also, traditional devices were applied in new ways to meet the requirements of frontier conflict. Lyndall Ryan noted that firesticks were adapted to be tossed through the air onto white

²⁴⁶ Connor 2002: 48
²⁴⁷ Reynolds, 1982 The Other Side of the Frontier 104; Lyndall Ryan 1981, 114
²⁴⁸ Connor 2002: 5
²⁴⁹ Blomfeld, 1981: 34
²⁵⁰ Harrison, R., 2002, Australia's Iron Age: Aboriginal post-contact metal artefacts from Old Lamboo Station, Southeast Kimberley, Western Australia, Australasian Historical Archaeology Vol. 20, pp. 67-76
²⁵¹ Philip Jones, 2007 Ochre and rust: artefacts and encounters on Australian frontiers Kent Town: Wakefield
²⁵² Campbell 1936: 20
²⁵³ William Clark, Aboriginal Ceremonies – the Bora Grounds. The Queenslander 9 Dec 1916 Q p 8
combatants, or onto roofs\textsuperscript{254} - a practice also popular in southern Queensland.\textsuperscript{255} Victorians used “flaming spears” and “firebrands affixed to their spears” to burn down huts – an entirely new technology.\textsuperscript{256} Huge fires were deliberately lit to burn out settlers or to destroy good pasture.\textsuperscript{257} In southern Queensland, deliberate bushfires halted the progress of explorers and settlers. For example, when Ross tried to reach the Darling Downs around 1860, Aboriginals set fire to the surrounding fields, forcing him to drive his flocks into the scrub\textsuperscript{258}

**Conclusions**

The precise nature of Australian Indigenous resistance will doubtless require dedicated analysis for decades to come. This particular study found a sound case for the existence of a region-wide (over 200 kms) historically-identifiable “war” of resistance in southern Queensland. Reading this as a “guerrilla/terrorist engagement” appears to be correct, and assists in understanding its nature, even though the chronicling of this conflict remains in its infancy.

The “Southern Queensland Black War” of 1843 to 1855 manifested various elements of historicity: a ‘declaration’, a pattern of escalation, evidence of an effective offensive, and some mode of cessation. However – on account of the nature of Aboriginal society – it featured much more overlap than similar conflicts abroad. What is intriguing is the considerable evidence for inter-tribal cooperation within this war, the level to which it impacted on civilian life and the sheer number of Indigenous victories in the early phase of this engagement (i.e. the routing would-be settlers from runs). The latter has yet to be fully reconstructed, documented and mapped – let alone properly commemorated.

Lack of historical chronicling for resistance wars such as that of southern Queensland may relate to the limited attention given to better defining resistance tactics. The survey of tactics conducted here found that Indigenous resistance in Australia took a rather different road to that of similar contests overseas. This may explain why it has been often misunderstood and underrated to date.

For instance, it did not entail massive casualties for the white population. It utilized a mode of leadership and coordination rather different from that of North American ‘war chiefs’ – more secretive, cunning and reticent. Apparently this only evolved with the onset of invasion. Aboriginal groups also lacked the level of access to guns and horses that American Indian

\textsuperscript{254} Ryan 1981.; 115

\textsuperscript{255} Domestic Intelligence Ipswich, 23 August 1851 p 2

\textsuperscript{256} D.S.S., The Blacks in the "Forties." The Coburg Leader (Vic.) 8 March 1912, p 4; Port Philip, The Cornwall Chronicle 16 September 1843 p 3

\textsuperscript{257} Ryan 1981, 103

\textsuperscript{258} Crawow. The First Owner The Central Queensland Herald (Rockhampton, 17 November 1932 p 31
groups enjoyed, and after 1838 they mostly faced off against armed civilians (supported by police) rather than army regiments.

Particularly within southern Queensland, Indigenous resistance seems to have primarily manifested as a ‘psychological war’ - harassment, targeted payback killings and large-scale (but highly successful) economic sabotage. However, contrary to popular assumption, many engagements were pitched battles. Moreover, the transition to more furtive guerrilla-style ambush attacks continued to involve “massed lines of warriors” as per traditional warfare. It also appears that the decades-long academic interest in “massacres” obscured the fact that even when attacked at their camps, Aboriginal warriors generally stood their ground and ‘gave fight’ (a defensive battle).

Leichhardt found that in Indigenous battles, people were “rarely killed but often wounded.” He also witnessed that “extermination battles are completely lacking.”\textsuperscript{259} Ironically, this “low-violence” strategy (especially when compared with reprisals conducted by white vigilantes and Native Police corps) resulted in Indigenous military achievement being severely under-rated. For instance, the vast and relentless raids on stock, stores and crops drove back settlement for months to years in some places. However, being largely bloodless, it is rarely celebrated today, even in Indigenous circles. A fuller investigation of such “Indigenous victories” will doubtless prove a fruitful endeavour.

\textsuperscript{259} Darragh & Fensham (eds), \textit{The Leichhardt diaries}, 392
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